

Tunisian president postpones France visit

PARIS (AFP) — Tunisian president Zine Al Abidine Ben Ali has postponed a visit to France planned for early May, the international Arabic daily Al Hayat reported Wednesday, citing informed sources here. An official source in Tunis said Mr. Ben Ali spoke to French President Jacques Chirac by telephone on Tuesday. Al Hayat said they decided to postpone the trip because Mr. Chirac has announced snap general elections in France for the end of May and early June. Mr. Ben Ali's visit has been scheduled since last year, but no precise date has been officially announced.

Jordan Times

An independent Arab political daily published by the Jordan Press Foundation
جوردان تايمز يومية مستقلة تصدر عن المؤسسة الصحفية الأردنية «الوأي»



Mubarak to visit Germany in May

CAIRO (AFP) — President Hosni Mubarak is to travel to Germany on May 23 to discuss the Middle East peace process and economic links between the two states as well as with Europe, Egypt's official MENA news agency said Wednesday. It said German Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel's mission to Cairo on May 6-7 would prepare the ground for Mr. Mubarak's visit, which is to last several days.

Volume 22 Number 6512

AMMAN THURSDAY-FRIDAY, APRIL 24-25, 1997, DUH'L HIJJA 17-18, 1417

Price: Jordan 200 Fils

King, Arafat discuss stalled peace process and stress value of coordination in action



His Majesty King Hussein on Wednesday confers with Palestinian President Yasser Arafat at the Royal Palace in Aqaba (Photo by Yousef Al 'Allan)

AQABA (Petra) — Jordanian and Palestinian delegations Wednesday underlined the need for pursuing coordination efforts between them in the coming stage to work with regional and international powers to surge the Middle East peace process.

His Majesty King Hussein and President Yasser Arafat met in the presence of His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan at the Royal Palace in Aqaba.

A statement followed the meeting in Aqaba said the two sides were seeking to put the peace process back on

track and to remove obstacles standing in its way.

Mr. Arafat briefed King Hussein on the Palestinian leadership's talks with the U.S. administration and outcome of his meeting with Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy in Malta.

King Hussein reiterated to Mr. Arafat Jordan's full support for the Palestinians in their quest to regain their legitimate rights on their national soil.

Mr. Arafat accompanied by an official delegation including Mahmoud Abbas, Saeb Erekat, Nabil Abu

Rdaina congratulated the King on the success of the surgery he underwent in early April at Mayo Clinic.

The Jordanian side at the meeting included Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali, Chief of the Royal Court Awn Khasawneh, Prince Talal Ben Mohammad, the head of the National Security Council, and the head of the Jordanian representation office in Gaza.

Mr. Arafat and his delegation left Aqaba and were seen off by Prince Hassan, the prime minister and other officials.

Fujimori celebrates victory; rebels vow to retaliate hard

LIMA (R) — Peru on Wednesday celebrated the storming of the besieged Japanese ambassador's home, where elite commandos freed 71 hostages and 14 Marxist rebel captors were killed after being surprised playing indoor soccer.

A relieved, ebullient President Alberto Fujimori basked in the victorious end on Tuesday to the toughest crisis of his career, but he was careful to avoid appearing over-confident.

"It could be that (terrorism) is not defeated. There are still some, but Peru cannot give in to terrorists' blackmail and Peru should show the international community that terrorism has no impact," he told reporters in the early hours of Wednesday after a meal with top ministers and aides.

The Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement's (MRTA) Dec. 17 storming of the diplomatic com-

pound was the most daring strike in 17 years of violence in Peru, which has cost more than 30,000 lives and \$25 billion in infrastructure damage.

The deaths of the 14-strong band who carried out the attack, including its leader Nestor Cerna Caratini, foiled the MRTA's plan to achieve a mass release of jailed comrades and left the group with just 200-odd fighters hiding in the jungle.

Peru's larger Shining Path movement, although overshadowed by the MRTA in recent months, remains a more potent threat.

"We are prepared to face whatever eventuality," added Mr. Fujimori.

But the rule that decides our conduct is not to retreat against terrorism, not one little bit."

Tuesday afternoon's successful operation by 140 commandos from all three armed services brought an outpouring of rejoicing in

Peru. Citizens took to the streets to wave flags, cheer and honk car horns. Congressmen rose to cheer "long live Peru" during a roll-call in parliament, which included the names of five legislators among the freed hostages.

One captive — a supreme court judge — two soldiers and all 14 guerrillas, including two women, died in the fierce battle that ended the four-month siege.

Judge Carlos Giusti Acuna, who was wounded and then died after a heart attack, was to be given a formal wake at the Palace of Justice in downtown Lima.

The still-smoking diplomatic compound, where the rebels' bodies remained, was closed off for two days during which it will be swept for mines and booby-traps laid by the MRTA.

Troops avoided those dangers as they swarmed into the compound over

walls from private houses and burst into the building from tunnels in an eruption of gunfire and explosions. Some tossed smoke bombs and grenades, while others fired sniper shots through the smoke using laser-guided rifles.

The attack was timed to coincide with an indoor soccer game by the rebels, most of whom were teenagers trained in Peru's remote eastern jungle zone.

A rebel said the four youngest Tupac Amaru members tried to surrender before being killed. "They were in a room on their own. They gave up out of fear," the MRTA rebel, who asked to remain anonymous but identified himself using a codename, told Reuters.

But troops had orders to kill.

The MRTA member said he heard the four surrendered while he was monitoring an open, short-wave

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Moves escalate to reverse decision exonerating Netanyahu in scandal

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Efforts intensified Wednesday to overturn a legal decision clearing Benjamin Netanyahu in an influence-peddling scandal as reports surfaced that recommendations from key prosecutors that the Israeli leader should be put on trial were ignored.

The political opposition led by the Labour Party submitted a petition demanding that parliament, the Knesset, be recalled from recess for a special session on Mr. Netanyahu's role in the scandal surrounding his appointment in January of a political crony as attorney general.

Opposition politicians, who have filed several appeals with the supreme court against the decision not to indict Mr. Netanyahu, also on Wednesday called a meeting of the state comptrollers' commission to launch a fresh probe into the affair.

The committee was scheduled to meet once the supreme court rules on the appeals, probably in early May, Chairman Raanan Cohen of the Labour Party

said. "We cannot leave such a tainted prime minister in office, democracy needs to be protected by the parliament," said Yossi Sarid, head of the left-wing Meretz party which joined Labour in pressing for parliamentary action.

Mr. Cohen also called for the creation of an independent government investigation into the scandal sparked by the short-lived appointment of Jerusalem lawyer Roni Bar-On as attorney general.

While the opposition initiative was at first given little chance of success in forcing an indictment of Mr. Netanyahu, it gained weight Wednesday with news that three senior state prosecutors had written a dissenting report strongly recommending that the prime minister and senior aides be indicted.

Public radio and main newspapers said State Attorney Edna Arbel and Attorney General Eliakim Rubinstein refused to release an 18-page report written by the three prosecutors when they announced their decision on Sunday that there was

insufficient evidence to charge Mr. Netanyahu in the affair.

The three senior members of Mr. Arbel's office were considered the principle criminal law experts involved in the investigation into charges that Mr. Netanyahu appointed Mr. Bar-On in a bid to have criminal cases against key political allies dropped.

In their report, the attorneys agreed with police recommendations that sufficient evidence existed to indict Mr. Netanyahu, Justice Minister Tzahi Hanegbi and the prime minister's chief-of-staff, Avigdor Lieberman, of fraud and breach of trust in the case, the media reported.

But Mr. Arbel and Mr. Rubinstein ignored their report and did not consult the three during deliberations last week which led to their decision not to indict the three men.

In their ruling, Mr. Arbel and Mr. Rubinstein agreed only to seek indictment of Ariel Deri, head of the powerful religious party Shas, who allegedly threatened to withdraw his support for Mr. Netanyahu's

coalition if Mr. Bar-On was not appointed.

Mr. Deri has been on trial for bribery for the past three years and prosecutors charge he had reached a deal with Mr. Bar-On that would have led to most charges against him being dropped.

In their report, the three dissenting prosecutors argued that Mr. Deri could not be singled out for indictment on extortion and bribery charges as recommended by Mr. Rubinstein unless Mr. Netanyahu and Mr. Hanegbi gave into his demands and thus were equally guilty of criminal wrongdoing.

"It is very difficult to justify only indicting Mr. Deri when the charges against him are linked to the actions of the prime minister and justice minister," Israel Radio quoted the prosecutors' report as saying.

The Israeli press meanwhile kept up a barrage of fierce criticism of Mr. Netanyahu on Wednesday, with the independent Haaretz writing he "does

(Continued on page 7)

Hamas urges PNA to release prisoners, back new intifada

GAZA CITY (AFP) — The Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) on Wednesday urged the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) to release some 200 militants it is holding and back a new intifada uprising against Israel.

"We demand the release of these militants, 100 of whom belong to Hamas and have been held in Gaza prisons for the past 13 months," said Mahmoud Zahar, the Hamas spokesman in Gaza City.

The other 100 activists belong to the smaller Islamic Jihad movement and were picked up following two botched suicide attacks last month targeting Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip.

Only the bombers were killed when their explosives detonated, apparently prematurely.

Those attacks came amid a wave of violence which erupted over Israel's decision in mid-March to begin construction of a new Jewish settlement in Arab East Jerusalem.

The attacks included a Hamas bombing which killed three Israeli women and the bomber in a Tel Aviv cafe on March 21. Mr. Zahar charged that despite claims by the PNA that it had frozen security cooperation with Israel in response to that decision, Palestinian police continued to arrest and harass militants.

He said police regularly arrested dozens of Hamas and Islamic Jihad members on the West Bank, then released them and rearrested them in a policy of harassment "which hampers all action against Israel."

"We call on the Palestinian (National) Authority to stop this security cooperation with Israel and join in resurrecting the intifada against Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands," he said.

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Iraq has no more banned weapons, Tareq Aziz says

BAGHDAD (R) — Deputy Prime Minister Tareq Aziz said on Wednesday Iraq was stripped of materials and weapons banned under the 1991 Gulf war ceasefire.

Mr. Aziz sent a letter to the chairman of the U.N. Security Council in response to the half-yearly report to the council presented by Rolf Ekeus, head of the U.N. Special Commission (UNSCOM) in charge of Iraqi disarmament, on April 12.

"There are no banned weapons or their components or means to produce them and there are no banned activities in Iraq," Mr. Aziz said in the letter carried by the official Iraqi news agency.

Mr. Ekeus accused Iraq of concealing small but significant quantities of banned weapons.

Mr. Aziz dismissed the charge as "mere suspicions and suppositions which cannot be certified."

UNSCOM confirmation that Iraq has destroyed its weapons of mass destruction is a key condition for the removal of the remaining curbs on Iraqi oil exports.

Iraq is currently exporting limited amounts of oil under a U.N. plan to ease the impact of sweeping economic sanctions

imposed for its 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

Mr. Ekeus also said Iraq was obstructing U.N. arms monitoring activities as well as helicopter flights by his arms inspectors.

He urged Baghdad to make a political decision "once and for all" on its ambitions to retain and acquire dangerous arms.

Mr. Aziz said UNSCOM had 332 Iraqi sites under constant surveillance and that its export-import mechanism to ensure no banned materials entered Iraq was in full operation.

The UNSCOM report neglected Iraqi progress in the annihilation of its weapons and focused on issues which the two sides could easily solve by working together, he said.

Mr. Aziz said he had agreed with Mr. Ekeus on steps to close the biological warfare file, still the thorniest issue in relations with UNSCOM.

He said Mr. Ekeus's inspectors had carried out 550 missions in Iraq in the past six months and the biological experts had subjected 86 Iraqi installations to constant monitoring.

"Iraq's decision to give up its weapons of mass destruction and not possess them in the future is an obvious decision," Mr. Aziz said.

Israel blocks stone export for Gaza port

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Israel has banned the export of blocks of stone to the Gaza Strip to prevent the Palestinian construction of a port, an Israeli general said Wednesday. General Shlomo Yanai, who is commander for Israel's southern region, said the rocks were to be used for the construction of a jetty.

"We adopted this measure because the Palestinian (National) Authority started the construction before any accord with Israel on how the port will function," General Yanai told Israel Radio. "We cannot allow the Pales-

tinian National Authority to multiply its fait accomplis on the ground in the way it has already done in Rafah airport," in southern Gaza, the General said. A control tower and landing strip have already been built at the airport "without any accord on security matters," he said, referring to Israeli demands to supervise the movement of passengers and freight.

The Palestinians have repeatedly condemned the Israel's refusal to allow the construction of the port and airport in self-ruled Gaza as violations of the autonomy accords.

Iran enters second stage of massive war games

TEHRAN (AP) — Iran launched the second stage of its largest ever wargames near the strategic strait of Hormuz Wednesday, designed to test Tehran's array of missiles and demonstrate its military prowess.

Tehran Radio said that Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei launched the second day of manoeuvres with a parade of some 200 vessels.

It said they included the Ashura fast attack boat, the Tondar missile-launching vessel, and the Tareq, a vessel whose specifications the radio did not give.

Mohsen Rezaie, head of the Revolutionary Guard that is taking part in the exercises, said that the vessels in the manoeuvres have been either built domestically or repaired and equipped by Iranian experts, the radio reported.

The manoeuvres focus on demonstrating Iran's naval might and its ability to control the strategic strait — gateway for about one-fifth of the world's oil supplies.

More than 200,000 Revolutionary Guard members and volunteers are taking part in the three-day war games, named Tareq Al Quds (Road to Jerusalem). Ayatollah Khamenei is overseeing the exercises in his role as commander-in-chief of Iran's armed forces.

Mr. Rezaie said that the manoeuvres were aimed at proving Iran's military might to its Gulf Arab neighbours and to the United States and Israel, which Tehran considers its arch-enemies.

"The military exercises are a testimony to the fact that Iran can defend its sea and land borders without any assistance from outside," the radio quoted him as saying.

The wargames are being staged along Iran's entire Gulf coast.

The official Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) said Ayatollah Khamenei also looked at missile projects Wednesday, but it gave no details.

Israeli army destroys third Hamas member's home in Surif

EBRON (AFP) — An Israeli army bulldozer demolished on Wednesday the home of a West Bank militant accused of belonging to Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas). The home of Jamal Abed Al Hur, 28, as the third house destroyed over the past week in the town of Surif, the base of the six-man Hamas cell responsible for the attacks. Residents threw stones at the Israeli army sent to demolish the house, but the clashes were limited as most of the town's inhabitants were kept in their homes by a strict curfew imposed on Surif at dawn, witnesses said.

Soldiers fired rubber bullets and tear-gas to force stone-throwers back into their houses, but no injuries were reported.

All three houses belonged to alleged members of the Hamas cell, according to General Uzi Dayan, the commander of Israeli troops in the West Bank who gave the final order for Wednesday's demolition, an army spokesman said.

Surif has been sealed off by the army since shortly after one of the Hamas group members killed three Israelis and himself in a bomb attack on a Tel Aviv cafe on March 21.

An investigation into the bombing led Israeli and Palestinian security agents to Surif, situated near Hebron, and the rest of the Hamas cell who

were arrested along with about 30 other men.

Under interrogation, members of the group allegedly admitted the kidnapping of an Israeli soldier and a series of drive-by shootings which killed seven other Israelis.

Tensions remained high on Wednesday in Surif, a town of 15,000.

On Monday three local youths were wounded, one seriously, in clashes which erupted over the scheduled destruction of Al Hur's home.

Wednesday and Thursday last week more than 50 inhabitants of Surif were wounded in clashes which coincided with the destruction of the first two homes.

West Bank teachers decide to end strike after leaders released by police

RAMALLAH (AFP) — West Bank teachers decided Wednesday to end an unprecedented strike against the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) after President Yasser Arafat's self-rule government released detained strike leaders and offered the school employees a pay raise, officials said.

A strike committee meeting in Ramallah decided to return to work Thursday, ending an 18-day walkout that at its height involved more than 10,000 teachers and kept 200,000 pupils out of class, teachers said.

Palestinian police allowed 15 detained strike leaders in Ramallah out of jail to meet with their followers Wednesday about compromise proposals to end the labour dispute, the first by employees of Mr. Arafat's autonomy administration since it was formed in 1994.

However, police kept back the belongings and identity cards of the leaders who faced the threat of continued detention if the meeting failed to broker a solution to the dispute.

The teachers said they had obtained a promise from West Bank security chief Jibril Rajub that all detained strikers would be freed, although sources in Bethlehem and Nablus said some men remained in jail as of Wednesday evening.

Strike organisers said as many as 85 teachers had been detained Monday and Tuesday in a bid by the PNA to crush the labour action, but the exact number of those held was unconfirmed.

Palestinian officials also offered the teachers a 10 per cent pay hike, compared to the 200 per cent raise sought by the strikers, and promised to examine other



Palestinian teachers discuss their strike during a sit-in they held at the Palestinian Office of Education in Bethlehem on Wednesday (Reuters photo)

demands once schools were reopened, the teachers said.

The final agreement ending the strike was to be ratified later Wednesday by a general assembly of teachers, they said.

The teachers, led by a breakaway faction of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO)-controlled Union of School Employees, launched their strike on April 5 after getting a similar 10 per cent pay hike which they viewed as insufficient.

But they accepted Wednesday's additional offer under threats from Palestinian security and education ministry officials of further arrests and dismissals if they did not give in, teachers said.

Many teachers had already returned to work Wednesday, notably in the northern city of Nablus, after security and education officials threatened them with dismissal if they pursued the strike, teachers said.

Teachers earn an average of \$300 a month, while the monthly cost of living for a Palestinian family is estimated at \$750.

They complain their wages are lower than those in other government ministries, which they say Mr. Arafat has bloated with high-paid cronies.

But Arafat on Saturday said his administration could not afford the sharp pay hike sought by the teachers, notably due to the impact of repeated Israeli

security closures of the Palestinian territories over the past year. The authority has a budget deficit of more than \$100 million, mostly due to the closures imposed following anti-Israeli attacks.

When the teachers voted to continue the strike despite Mr. Arafat's appeal, police stepped in and began arresting their leaders.

On Wednesday, police also deployed around many schools, notably in Ramallah, in a bid to keep students from leaving their classrooms, witnesses said.

The elected Palestinian legislative council, meeting in Ramallah Wednesday, issued a statement calling on security forces to release all jailed teachers and stop

"interfering" in the dispute. But the deputies also recommended that the teachers accept the 10 per cent pay offer and return to work.

"The difficult situation for our people now cannot tolerate that the education of hundreds of thousands of students be disrupted," said Deputy Salah Tumari.

Civil rights groups expressed alarm at the latest illustration of Mr. Arafat's heavy-handed response to dissent against his administration.

"The teachers' arrests make us more worried about the status of democracy and freedom of expression in Palestinian society," said Rizia Shukair of the Ramallah-based human rights movement Al Haq.

Five Israeli soldiers rebuked for mistreating Palestinians

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Two Israeli police officers were dismissed for beating a youth during protests in the West Bank town of Surif, while three soldiers were detained after opening fire on an Arab car outside Jerusalem, military officials said Wednesday.

One of the officers in the paramilitary border police was dismissed for beating a youth in Surif who refused to pick up stones that had been thrown at Israeli troops during clashes in the town, the officials said.

The second officer was dismissed for witnessing the incident without intervening, they said. Israeli army regulations forbid soldiers from forcing protesters to pick up stones thrown during confrontations.

Surif has been the scene

of almost daily incidents since it was besieged by the army last month after an armed Islamic group was discovered operating out of the town.

Members of the six-man unit of the Islamic Movement (Hamas) killed 11 Israelis in over a year of attacks which included a March 21 bombing in a Tel Aviv cafe which left three Israelis and the bomber dead.

Intense clashes between residents and Israeli security forces broke out last week when the army began demolishing three homes belonging to members of the Hamas squad.

The third house was razed Wednesday morning but there were few incidents of violence as the army had imposed a curfew on the

town at dawn. In another incident reported Wednesday, the army arrested three soldiers who shot at a Palestinian car on Monday while they were off-duty.

The soldiers were on an outing near the Israeli town of Mevo Betar, located on the green line separating Israel from the West Bank, when they tried to stop two Arab men they believed were acting suspiciously.

The soldiers opened fire when the Palestinians climbed into their car and left the area.

No one was wounded, but police arrested the three soldiers and turned them over to military authorities to investigate if the shooting was justified, officials said.

UAE papers back Iraq on Hajj flights, criticise U.S.

DUBAI (AFP) — The United Arab Emirates (UAE) newspapers on Wednesday criticised the United States over its policy toward Iraq and called for an end to the nearly seven years of crippling sanctions on the Gulf oil-producer.

The papers supported Baghdad's decision to defy a Western-imposed no-fly zone in southern Iraq by flying helicopters to the border with Saudi Arabia this week to ferry back Muslims pilgrims to Mecca.

"Iraq has the undisputed right to fly its civilians wherever it wants, especially so when it is a religious matter," the English-language daily Gulf Today said.

"Iraqis are a vital part of the region. They cannot be left in the cold forever, and

that too on flimsy excuses," it added.

"They have already suffered too much. So the U.S. needs to reconsider its policies rather than impose the present one on others. If it does not retrieve the situation now, it will only accentuate the situation."

Another English daily, Khaleej Times, described the embargo imposed by the United Nations against Iraq for its 1990 invasion of neighbouring Kuwait as one of the "most savage" against any U.N. member.

It said Baghdad defied the no-fly zone to test "its hypothesis that an increasing number of countries are becoming impatient with the seemingly indefinite extension of the unimposed sanctions."

Iraqi opposition leader expelled from Britain back to Syria

DAMASCUS (AFP) — An Iraqi opposition leader held at London's Heathrow International Airport for eight days has returned to Syria after being refused entry into Britain.

Misham Al Juburi, leader of the Damascus-based Iraqi National Party, told AFP he arrived in Damascus on Tuesday and that he had been denied entry to Britain because of his anti-sanctions views.

"I am the victim of a repressive action because of my ideas and my stances in favour of the Iraqi people and against the embargo imposed upon them," said Mr. Juburi.

Mr. Juburi said he was against an existing "American-Israeli plan, which includes the involvement of regional governments, aimed at splitting Iraq up into a federation."

Iraq has been under a U.N. embargo since its August 1990 invasion of neighbouring Kuwait.

The British Home Office has said the expelled opposition leader was detained on April 14 "for reasons of national security" and refused re-entry after a trip to Syria.

He said he was questioned only once by immigration officials, in the presence of his lawyer, during the eight days. "The questions centred around my activities in Syria and the reason for my trip to this country although the document given to me said that I constituted a threat to British security and interests," he said.

Failures of Netanyahu, Arafat faulted for Mideast disarray

LONDON (AFP) — A combination of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's intransigence and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat's weakness have left the Middle East peace process floundering in disarray, a strategic survey said.

The juxtaposition of the diametrically opposing persons have brought the peace process virtually back to square one, "still breathing" but "only weakly," the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) said in its strategic survey 1996-97.

The survey is critical of both men, but more so of the Israeli leader, whose heavy-handed tactics it blames for the Palestinian leader's perceived weakness, which in turn eroded his own influence.

"Arafat's ability to control extreme Arab parties, intolerant of the idea of peace... has depended on showing that advances in the peace agreement would result in a better economic and political life for the Palestinians," said the IISS.

The prime minister has not allowed him to do this, it said. Mr. Netanyahu's "own preference for what he believes is firm security over a delicate peace has led him to delay, and try to change, the carefully wrought Oslo accords (September 1993)

which offered a way forward."

Mr. Netanyahu came under heavy pressure from the Israeli left and from Washington to withdraw Israeli forces from the West Bank town of Hebron as mandated by Oslo, and even greater pressure by his right-wing not to.

"In an attempt to narrow the gap between himself and his rightist critics, Mr. Netanyahu engaged in a delicate balancing act by expanding settlements in Jerusalem and securing Israel's control over its outer suburbs," said the IISS.

The decision in February to build a new Jewish settlement at Jabal Abu Ghneim was part of that strategy, said the survey. It succeeded only partially, gaining approval from Israel's right-wing, but sparking Palestinian outrage which exacerbated the situation overall.

"The Palestinians and Arabs... saw it as another Israeli attempt to create irreversible facts on the ground" before the beginning of talks on the final status of Jerusalem and the West Bank which were set for late last month.

Mr. Netanyahu's "compensation" to the Arabs — an offer to build homes for them as well and increase the transfer of West Bank land to the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) by two per cent — "was

derided by the Palestinians," said the IISS.

"The result is that the deadly cycle of tit-for-tat violent retaliations — Israeli tear-gas, water cannons and rubber bullets, against Palestinian rock-throwing street demonstrations — is once again under way," said the survey.

"The Israeli settlement policies and the worsening conditions of Palestinians... weaken the credibility of Arafat's repeated promises... of an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital," it said.

"As the gap between promise and reality widens and the inability of the PNA to force Israel to change its positions becomes clearer, Arafat has vacillated between massively suppressing the opposition and initiating a dialogue with it," said the survey. But neither tactic has worked, and Mr. Arafat's "bargaining position remains weak and his freedom of political action limited," said the IISS.

The survey suggests that only a stronger U.S. intervention in the process could now move it forward.

"As long as Washington continues to see 'message carrying' as the limit of its diplomatic ambitions in the area, the negotiating pace is unlikely to increase."

Sudanese president calls for peace while rebel forces press forward

KHARTOUM (AP) — President Omar Al Bashir called on rebels Wednesday to lay down their arms and pledged that his government would boost aid for the impoverished south.

The call comes two days after Sudan signed a peace agreement with four southern rebel leaders.

But the agreement does not include the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), a coalition of opposition groups, which said Wednesday it had captured a small town that is the gateway to a major railroad centre in north-eastern Sudan.

The rebels said Togan, 60 kilometres northeast of the railroad centre of Kassala, fell to its forces on Sunday.

Meanwhile, John Garang, leader of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), said his forces were pressing on toward Juba, a key town in southern Sudan. The SPLA is allied with the NDA.

At a rally in Khartoum, General Bashir appealed to "all those carrying arms to join us in this peace march."

He vowed that his government would "rally all the resources, all the money... to rebuild the south."

The treaty signed Monday gives southerners more power in running their daily affairs and calls for a referendum after a four-year interim period in which southerners would decide on whether their

region should secede.

In an interview with the London-based Al Hayat newspaper, Colonel Garang said that "the war in the south is to end soon."

"The Islamic regime in Khartoum is on its way to fall," Col. Garang added.

He said his forces were some 80 kilometres from Juba.

The capture of Juba, a port on the west bank of the White Nile, would give the rebels control of western and eastern Equatoria province, an area about a third the size of France.

The SPLA has been fighting since 1983 for more autonomy for the mostly animist and Christian south from the Islamist north.

JORDAN TELEVISION

Tel. 773111-19

PROGRAMME TWO

14:05Ovide & The Gang
14:30Raw Toonage
14:45Curiosity Show
15:10They Came From Outer Space
16:00N.B.A. Show
17:00Out of This World
17:30French Programmes
19:30News Headlines
19:35Parenthood
20:00Cinema, Cinema
20:30 The American Chart Show
21:00Kung Fu
22:00News in English
22:35 Feature Film — "Love Among Thieves"

PRAYER TIMES

14:30Fajr
(6:53)(Sunrise) Duha
12:34Dhuhr
16:12Asr
19:15Maghrib
20:38Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church
Swiffen, Tel. 810740
Assemblies of God Church Tel.
632785.
St. Joseph Church Tel. 624590
Church of the Annunciation
Tel. 637440.
De la Salle Church Tel. 661757.

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

Terra Sancta Church Tel.

622366
Anglican Church Tel. 652826.
Armenian Catholic Church
Tel. 771331.
Armenian Orthodox Church
Tel. 775261.
St. Ephraim Church Tel.
771751.
Amman International Church
Tel. 827126
Evangelical Lutheran Church
Tel. 824328.
German-speaking Evangelical
Congregation Tel. 845457
The Latter-Day Saints Tel.
654932.
Church of Nazareth Tel.
675691.

The Evangelical Local Church
in Amman Tel. 811295
English-speaking
Latin Catholics Parish Tel.
614190.

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology
The Kingdom is expected to remain under the effect of the hot air mass for the next three days. It will be hot, dry, and dusty with winds southwesterly to southeasterly moderate to active. In Aqaba, winds will be northerly

moderate and seas calm.

Mini/Max. Temperatures
Amman20/35
Aqaba24/40
Deserts18/36
Jordan Valley23/39

Yesterday's high temperatures:
Amman 35, Aqaba 40 Humidity
readings: Amman 20 per cent,
Aqaba 21 per cent.

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

NIGHT DUTY
AMMAN:
Dr. Ghaleb Zawaideh736011
Dr. Jihad Sammour765018
Dr. Hisham Kam'an790286
Dr. Bilal Al Sayid890280
Firas pharmacy661912
Ferdows pharmacy778336
Al Asena pharmacy637055
Nairokh pharmacy623672
Al Salam pharmacy636730
Yacoub pharmacy644945
Shmeisani pharmacy637660
Najib pharmacy847632

IRBID:

Dr. Ahmad Qana281484
Al Quds pharmacy(—)
ZARQA:
Dr. Akram Haddad985550
Khalifeh pharmacy985417

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre637111
Civil Defence Department661111
Civil Defence Immediate Rescue630341
Rescue Police 192, 621111.
637777
Fire Brigade617101
Blood Bank775121
Highway Police843402
Traffic Police896390
Public Security Department630321
Hotel Complaints605800
Price Complaints661176
Water and Sewerage Complaints897467
Amman Municipality Complaints787111
Telephone Information (directory assistance)121
Overseas Calls010230
Central Amman Telephone Repairs623101
Abdali Telephone Repairs561101
Jordan Television773111
Radio Jordan774111
Water Authority680100
Jordan Electricity Authority815615
Electric Power Company636381

HOSPITALS

AMMAN:
Hussein Medical Centre813813/32
Khalidi Maternity642381/6
Alkhef Maternity642341/2
Jabal Amman Maternity642362
Malhas, J. Amman636140
Palestine, Shmeisani 607071
Shmeisani Hospital669131
University Hospital845845
Al-Muasher Hospital66727/9
The Islamic, Abdali 666126/37
Al-Ahli, Abdali664164/6
Italian, Al-Muhajreen777101/3
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Army, Marisa891611/15
Queen Alia Hospital602240/50
Amal Hospital674155
The Arab Centre for Heart and Special Surgery865199

ZARQA:

Zarqa Govt. Hospital09983323
Zarqa National Hospital

FOR THE TRAVELLER

QUEEN ALIA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT
This information is supplied by Royal Jordanian (RJ) information department at the Queen Alia International Airport Tel. (08)83200 where it should always be verified.
Information on other flights are supplied on phone 08 (52700) or 08(53250).

ARRIVALS

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
08:15Sanaa (RJ)
10:30New Delhi (RJ)
10:45Bombay (RJ)

DEPARTURES

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
07:10Moscow (RJ)

Other Flights

10:30Riyadh (SV)
12:55Doha (GF)
13:40Sanaa (AZ)
15:00Rome (AH)
16:15Dubai (EK)
20:10Beirut (ME)
20:35Cairo (MS)
21:40Tel Aviv (LY)
23:00Jeddah (add) (SV)
18:55Tel Aviv (RW)

Other Flights

03:00Athens(OA)
05:15Istanbul (TK)
07:45Beirut (ME)
12:00Riyadh (SV)
13:45 Bahrain, Abu Dhabi (GF)
14:30Al Ain (AJ)
16:00Rome (AZ)
17:15Dubai, Damascus (EK)
21:25Cairo (MS)
23:59Jeddah (add) (SV)

07:20Beirut (RJ)

09:45Aqaba, Madrid (add) (RJ)
12:00Aqaba, Paris (RJ)
12:30Abu Dhabi, Al Ain (RJ)
12:30Paris, Rome (RJ)
13:15Amsterdam, Montreal, Toronto (RJ)
13:20London (RJ)
13:25Amsterdam Chicago (RJ)
14:00Jeddah (add) (RJ)
18:00Athens (RJ)
21:15Bahrain, Doha (RJ)
21:20Jeddah (RJ)
22:00Abu Dhabi, Jakarta (add) (RJ)
22:40Cairo (RJ)
01:00Jeddah (add) (RJ)
01:25Kuala Lumpur, Jakarta (RJ)
02:10Jeddah (add) (RJ)
02:15Lamaca (RJ)
03:00Jeddah (add) (RJ)
03:45Paris (add) (RJ)
04:30Jeddah (two flights — add) (RJ)
07:00Jeddah (add) (RJ)

April 24-25, 1997
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Home News

Jordan Times, Thursday-Friday, April 24-25, 1997

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Queen Noor presented with Baby-Friendly Certificate

AMMAN (J.T.) — Her Majesty Queen Noor Wednesday met with the Deputy Executive Director for External Relations of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Stephen Lewis at the National Task Force for Children (NTFC) headquarters in Shmeisani, according to a Royal Court statement.

Mr. Lewis was briefed on NTFC activities and programmes as well as those of the Noor Al Hussein Foundation (NHF) and he expressed UNICEF's appreciation of both organisations' efforts and achievements in programmes and activities aimed at improving the lives of children and women in Jordan and in the Arab World.

He noted that the NHC and the NTFC "do well with and complement UNICEF's work," particularly in the areas of education, child health and welfare and in the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the statement said.

Mr. Lewis described NHF's work on "education for peace" as "timely in view of the different areas of conflict around the world."

Chairman of the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI) Certification programme Dr. Saad Hijazi maintained that the Queen's "leadership in promoting breast-feeding has been of utmost importance as national public hospitals, where a total of approximately 40 per cent of deliveries take place, are now ready or nearly ready to be certified as Baby-Friendly Hospitals."



Her Majesty Queen Noor Wednesday receives Baby Friendly certificate, presented by Dr. Saad Hijazi in recognition of her leadership in promoting breast-feeding and other children's health measures (Petra photo)

Queen Noor, who chairs a two-year old multi-sectoral national breast-feeding committee which ensures the successful implementation of the baby friendly hospital initiative and the Jordanian code of marketing a breast milk substitute, expressed her pride in Jordan's major steps towards ensuring a supportive breast-feeding environment.

She commended initiatives undertaken by the Ministry of Health, the Royal Medical Services, UNICEF and the World Health Organisation (WHO) to ensure that all maternity services in the country become baby friendly, according to the statement.

UNICEF and WHO launched the Baby-Friendly Initiative in 1990, with support from world leaders, health experts and non-governmental organisations, to convince hospitals, health services and parents that breast feeding gives babies the best possible start in life.

Jordan adopted the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative in 1993, starting with Al Bashir Hospital in Amman and Badi'a Hospital in Irbid.

The former is the largest and the first hospital in the country to be certified as baby-friendly, the statement said.

Information campaigns and workshops have been conducted since that time to raise national awareness and commitment.

Jordan has also approved a national breast-feeding policy and has prohibited the marketing of breast milk substitutes in all public hospitals.

Experts in child nutrition, health and development believe that breast feeding is the most effective way to provide a baby with a caring environment and complete food.

Breast milk provides an infant's total - nutrient requirement for the first four to six months of life, and when combined with appropriate weaning foods, which saves the lives of more than 1.5 million children in the developing world by preventing malnutrition and infection, offers many health benefits

to mothers including child spacing, reducing the risk of anaemia, osteoporosis and multiple sclerosis as well as protection against ovarian and breast cancer.

In order to become baby friendly, hospitals and maternity centres must practice ten steps to successful breast feeding developed by UNICEF and WHO, which include informing pregnant women about the benefits of breast-feeding, helping mothers initiate breast-feeding within half an hour of giving birth and practising "rooming in" by allowing mothers and babies to remain together 24 hours a day.

Attending the meeting were Minister of Health and Medical Care Dr. Ashraf Kurdi, Advisor to the Queen, In'am Mutti, UNICEF Area Representative Dorrit Stahl, NHF Executive Director Yasser Tel, NTFC Coordinator Hayat Yaghi, UNICEF Regional Director Farid Rahman, Coordinator of the BFHI Programme Sameer Faouri and UNICEF Programme Officer Ayman Abu Laban.

Crown Prince calls for strengthening coordination between Jordan, Malaysia

AMMAN (Petra) — HRH Crown Prince Hassan Wednesday promoted Jordanian-Malaysian cooperation in various fields and called for the creation of a joint committee to strengthen economic, cultural and technological ties.

During a meeting at the Royal Court with visiting Malaysian Foreign Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, the Crown Prince compared the two countries in terms of geography and political policies.

He stated the similarity between the two countries provides an opportunity for strengthening coordination.

The strategic locations of Jordan and Malaysia, the two nations' moderate policies and their religious tolerance aid in the construction of a healthy, just society, Prince Hassan asserted.

He also detailed the necessity of cooperation between the two in combating Islamophobia, affirming that such cooperation can be accomplished through the Interfaith Centre at AL al Bayt University and the Malaysian Centre for Religious Understanding as well as other centres with similar objectives.

Prince Hassan maintained that Jordan is closely monitoring Islamic development in Malaysia as well as programmes to serve Muslim societies such as the Haj Fund.

He also emphasised the need for dialogue on pan-Islamic projects such as the creation of a Zakat (alms) fund.

Prince Hassan suggested the creation of a non-governmental organisation to promote the social development process in Islamic countries as well.

He further called for Jordan and Malaysia to coordinate efforts through unofficial channels in order to promote communication amongst intellectuals as well as attract politicians; he advocated an official channel to coordinate work among institutions and policy makers.

Prince Hassan then referred to the possibility of developing a joint

security conceptual framework to comprehensively cover humanitarian, social and economic security issues.

Urging the creation of appropriate mechanisms to stimulate regional coordination involving Southeast and Western Asia, the Crown Prince praised the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) as succeeding through integrated regional cooperation.

ASEAN has succeeded in unifying regional economies, something which could benefit the Kingdom, notably in infrastructure projects contributing to economic unity and integration, he said.

Mr. Badawi conveyed Malaysian Prime Minister Mahatir Mohammad's greetings to His Majesty King Hussein and Prince Hassan.

He stated that his country is eager to promote developmental cooperation with Jordan as well as pursue dialogue and meetings to achieve that goal.

At the meeting it was announced that Jordan will open an embassy in the Malaysian capital, Kuala Lumpur, and that Prince Hassan has accepted an invitation to visit Malaysia.

The meeting was attended by Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali, Chief of the Royal Court Awn Khasawneh, Deputy Prime Minister for Development Affairs and Minister of State for Prime Ministry Affairs Jawad Anani, Minister of Foreign Affairs Faysal Tarawneh, Minister of Trade, Industry and Supply Hani Mulki and Minister of Planning Rima Khalaf.

Earlier Wednesday, Jordan and Malaysia agreed to reactivate the work of the Higher Joint Jordanian-Malaysian Committee in order to contribute to the development of economic and trade links between the two.

This agreement was achieved between visiting Malaysian Foreign Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and his Jordanian counterpart, Faysal Tarawneh who confirmed that the two sides would hold joint ministerial

meetings, co-chaired by their respective foreign ministers to pursue negotiations on future cooperation, alternately in Amman and Kuala Lumpur.

After the meeting, the Malaysian minister described the aim of his visit to Jordan as to help further strengthen economic ties and discuss joint investments.

Mr. Tarawneh affirmed that the two countries are eager to intensify bilateral cooperation.

"Agreement was reached regarding the reactivation of the Higher Joint Committee's work and a Malaysian delegation will be arriving in Jordan soon for discussions regarding the employment of Jordanian workers needed for various specialisations in Malaysia," Dr. Tarawneh explained.

He confirmed that the balance of trade favours Malaysia but that the two sides have expressed willingness to adjust the balance through increasing Jordanian exports to Malaysian markets.

The two sides also explored prospects of launching joint ventures in Jordan with products to be marketed in neighbouring countries.

They also discussed ways that the Jordanian-European partnership agreement can benefit from exports of goods manufactured through joint ventures with Europe.

The Malaysian minister was later received by Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali with Mr. Tarawneh and Minister of Planning Rima Khalaf present.

They then reviewed bilateral relations and ways to promote economic and trade relations as well as the peace process and other regional issues.

Mr. Badawi also met with Minister of Education and Higher Education Munther Masri and the two reviewed exchanges of educational expertise.

They also discussed how Jordanian universities might provide instruction for Malaysian students.

Iraqi official details oil shipments to Jordan

AMMAN (J.T.) — Iraqi Minister of Oil Amer Mohammed Rashid and Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources Mohammad Saleh Horani Wednesday discussed Iraqi oil shipments to Jordan and explored the prospect of transporting the oil through pipelines instead of oil tankers.

They also covered joint exploration of oil and gas in Jordan.

Jordan and Iraq last January agreed on an oil price of \$19.1 per barrel for 4.5 million tonnes of crude oil from Iraq to be supplied to the Kingdom during the fiscal year of 1997.

Last year, Jordan paid \$15.25 per barrel for Iraqi oil and received \$250 million worth of oil supplied without cost.

However, under the January agreement, signed in Baghdad, Jordan is slated to receive \$300 million of oil from Iraq without charge, but it will also pay \$70 million extra for the general

total, resulting from the increase in the price of a barrel of oil.

Subsequent to the meeting, Mr. Horani described the talks as fruitful and stated that the Iraqi oil supply to Jordan was proceeding in accordance to the January agreement.

But the minister made no mention as to whether Iraq has agreed to lower oil prices as reportedly requested by Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali at a meeting with Iraqi Deputy Prime

U.S. government grant intended to encourage Jordanian exporters

AMMAN (J.T.) — The U.S. government has granted an additional sum of \$1 million to provide capital for the pre-shipment export credit guarantee facility at the Jordan Loan Guarantee Corporation which recently became operational, according to a U.S. Embassy statement.

A total of \$1.5 million was granted by the U.S. government to the capital of this facility during the first quarter of 1996.

The amount of \$2.5 million is now available for Jordanian exporters, the statement said.

Approximately 75 per cent of Jordanian exporters are small businesses which are experiencing difficulties in obtaining financing from

private banks, according to the statement.

The facility, currently operational, assists exporters seeking financing by issuing loan guarantees to banks in order to encourage them to extend credit to Jordanian exporters.

A business seeking financing must be privately owned and operating in Jordan, in order to qualify under this programme, the statement said.

If the borrower is an individual, he or she must be a Jordanian citizen or a permanent resident of Jordan. If the borrower is a business, it must be majority-owned by Jordanian interests, the statement concluded.

Algeria, Jordan to review education ties

AMMAN (Petra) — Algerian Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research Abu Baker Ben Buzaid Wednesday arrived in Amman with plans to hold talks on educational cooperation.

Upon arrival, the Algerian minister, accompanied by an official delegation, declared himself optimistic that talks with Minister of Education and Higher Education Munther Masri would garner positive results and further bolster bilateral ties.

He said Mr. Masri has been invited to visit to Algeria to follow up on these meetings.

Apart from meeting with Mr. Masri to learn about Jordanian educational developments, the Algerian delegation will visit public and private universities and will sign an agreement on bilateral cooperation in the field of higher education.

The Algerian minister is slated to deliver a lecture at the Centre for Strategic Studies of the University of Jordan regarding the current situation in his country before touring archaeological and tourist sites.

Mr. Buzaid was welcomed at the airport by Mr. Masri and told reporters there that his country expects to enter an era of stability following general and local elections.

Expert witness testifies in Masri case

By Rana Hussein
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — The Criminal Court Wednesday heard a poison expert in the case of Mazen Masri, 34, accused of killing his two children with cyanide in the Shmeisani area of Amman in September of last year.

Director of the Medicine Control Department at the Ministry of Health Samir Qamaz, 42, testifying for the defence, told the court that there are global rules and regulations in order to purchase the substance.

"I have not seen cyanide pills in Jordan, but I know that it is available on the international market and mostly used in agriculture," Dr. Qamaz stated.

"However, there are restrictions, special conditions and training for individuals who handle such substances," Dr. Qamaz stated, adding that individuals require a special licence to buy or handle such substances.

Mr. Masri reportedly confessed to authorities on Sept. 25 of last year of substituting vitamin pills for ones composed of cyanide before he left for work on the morning of Sept. 11.

He stated that his two children habitually took vitamins in the morning.

According to authorities, Mr. Masri confessed to purchasing the pills during a business trip to Canada.

Dr. Qamaz testified that children swallowing cyanide "could be killed in 15 minutes."

This depends on the meal the child consumed before taking the cyanide pill, the expert witness explained, citing as an example that when taken with milk, for example, the deadly effects could manifest themselves in less than ten minutes.

The two children, who were left alone for almost 25 minutes on the morning of Sept. 11, were found by their mother, Hiam Hamoudeh, collapsed in their Abu Unzeizah Housing complex.

Ms. Hamoudeh had just returned home after giving her husband a ride to work.

In January, Mr. Masri retracted his previous statements to authorities, claiming he had fabricated his confession "under psychological pressure by authorities."

He further claimed that the authorities threatened to summon his parents and his wife for questioning instead of him, which, he alleged, forced him into fabricating a confession.

The court tribunal headed by Justices Abdul Rahman Tawfiq, Ismael Hmouz and Marwan Dabbas, adjourned the court session to May 4, to hear the last two witnesses in the case.

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WHAT'S GOING ON

FILM

- * "Brigada central" (pts 5, 6, and 7) at Instituto Cervantes, Jabal Amman on Thursday at 5:00 p.m.
- * "Fern Gully: The Last Rainforest" at the American Center, Abdoun on Thursday at 5:00 p.m.
- * "Cezanne" (with commentary in Arabic by Adnan Al Sharif) at Darat Al Funun, Jabal Weibdeh on Thursday at 6:00 p.m.

LECTURE

- * "News Directions in the Study of the Epidemiology of Multiple Sclerosis in the Middle East" by Dr. Sami Khoury and Mr. Rajiv Sethi at the Jordanian-American Commission for Educational Exchange, Shmeisani, on Thursday 4:00 p.m.-6:00 p.m. (Tel. 684760).

CHOIR

- * Performance of religious songs by the Jordanian Baptist Community at the Royal Cultural Centre on Thursday at 8:00 p.m.

EXHIBITIONS

- * "First Amman International Exhibition of Children's Books" at the International Exhibition Centre, University Road, (Tel. 659891/2), until April 28.
- * Easter egg hunt at the Jordan Design and Trade Centre of Noor Al Hussein Foundation, off Wadi Saqra (Tel. 699141/2), until April 28.
- * Works by Lebanese plastic artists at Hamourabi Arts Gallery, Gardens Street (Tel. 5536098), until April 24.
- * Exhibition of frescoes of Jordanian mosaics and Fayum portraits by Dorothy Mango at the Jordan Arts and Crafts Centre/Artissana, Jabal Amman, Second Circle (Tel. 647858), until May 10.
- * Exhibition by the San Francisco-based Palestinian-American architectural photographer Said Hisham Nuseibeh entitled "The Farthest Mosque," at Darat Al Funun, Jabal Weibdeh, until May 8. Also displaying works by contemporary Arab artists.
- * Paintings by Vian Shamounki at the Jordan Plastic Art Association, Jabal Weibdeh, until April 25 (Tel. 623297).
- * Paintings by Yassin Al Mohammadani at the Orient Gallery, Shmeisani (Tel. 681303), until April 28.
- * Paintings by Patricia Chazalain at the French Cultural Centre, Jabal Weibdeh, until April 27.

Russian, Chinese leaders meet for talks in Moscow

MOSCOW (R) — Russian President Boris Yeltsin and Chinese leader Jiang Zemin met Wednesday for talks due to be crowned by a political declaration outlining their joint vision of the world order in the next century.

"This meeting is of paramount importance, maybe of a historic importance because we are deciding the destiny of the 21st century," ITAR-TASS news agency quoted Mr. Yeltsin as telling Mr. Jiang at the start of talks in the Kremlin.

The text of the declaration, which is due to be signed at noon (0800 GMT), has not been published.

But Mr. Yeltsin's spokesman Sergei Yastrzhembsky has said the document includes a clause in which Beijing and Moscow would express their opposition to "claims by any country to the role of absolute leader."

Officials from Russia and China, both of which have problems with the West and are jealous of the United States claims to the role of sole superpower in the post-cold war world, have said the declaration is not aimed against any specific country.

TASS quoted deputy Foreign Minister Grigory Karasin as rejecting sugges-

tions that Russia was boosting its ties with China to counterbalance NATO's plans to expand eastwards, which had prompted bitter objections from Moscow.

"For Russia, relations with China are a priority which does not depend on the situation in other spheres," Mr. Karasin said. Moscow and Beijing have made clear they want to set an example for other countries on how to maintain security and build bilateral ties.

"This new type of relationship includes a refusal to take part in military blocs, ruling out confrontation and any menace to third parties," interfax news agency quoted the Chinese ambassador to Moscow, Li Fenglin, as saying Tuesday.

Mr. Jiang, Mr. Yeltsin and the presidents of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan will on Thursday sign a treaty on reducing armed forces along the former Soviet-Chinese border.

Few details of the treaty have been made public. Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev's spokesman said Tuesday that the five states would reduce their forces deployed near the border and pull them back 100 kilometres.

Mr. Yeltsin and Mr. Jiang

will meet for more talks on Thursday. The Chinese leader will also meet heads of both chambers of the Russian parliament Wednesday and Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin Thursday.

Mr. Jiang is also expected to address the state Duma, the lower house of parliament, Wednesday.

But Russian officials said that the declaration and the treaty were the key points of the visit.

"The fact that there are few documents on the agenda highlights the importance of each of them," a Foreign Ministry official told Reuters.

"One reason keeping the agenda tight was to focus attention on the milestone quality of the issues that were included," he added.

Moscow did much to underline the importance of Jiang's visit.

The Chinese leader, accompanied by his wife Wang Yeping, will stay in the Kremlin during the visit — a rare honour.

Jiang, who knows Russia's language and literature, will go Friday to Yasnaya Polyana, the estate of writer and philosopher Leo Tolstoy about 200 kilometres south of Moscow. He will leave Moscow Saturday.



NEW FILM: Actress Sandra Bullock and actor Jason Patric, stars of the new action adventure film "Speed Two: Cruise Control" pose for photographers aboard the "Seabourn Legend" cruise ship which was the actual ship used in filming the movie during a press preview of the film at Catalina Island, California, on Tuesday. The film opens in the United States this summer (Reuters photo)

Red Cross launch food distribution for displaced Afghanis

KABUL (AFP) — Heavy fighting in Afghanistan is still forcing thousands of people to flee to safer areas of the country, according to Red Cross figures released Wednesday.

Launching a massive food distribution programme for civilians displaced by the ongoing civil war, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has noted a crisis throughout the country.

The ICRC had to react since the beginning of the year to the large influx of displaced people (IDP's), mainly in Kabul, Panjshir, Pul-e-Khumri and Mazari-e-Sharif, an ICRC press release said.

The statement said fresh arrivals of civilians are particularly critical in the western city of Herat, where civilians are travelling to escape fighting in Badghis "around 50 new families arrive daily at Shaidat transit camp (Herat), causing overcrowding," the statement said. The ICRC use a figure of six persons per family.

Mahathir muses on Malaysians hanging out undergarments to dry

KUALA LUMPUR (AFP) — Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, who has a penchant for speaking his mind, has criticised high-rise flat dwellers for hanging out their undergarments in the open to dry.

"We hang our underwear like flags. The Triumph and Maidenform and Crocodile brands are there for all to see. We know we all use these but you need not display them outside," the New Straits Times on Wednesday quoted Mr. Mahathir as telling residents in the northern state of Penang.

He suggested that high-rise buildings be equipped with machines to dry the clothes of flat dwellers within their premises.

"In a developed country there is no need for the prime minister to go around talking about such matters, but the prime minister here has to give such advice," Mr. Mahathir lamented.

He said Malaysians should discard outdated habits in order to progress into the multimedia information age.

"Our lifestyle must change to keep abreast with modern trends and rapid development ... we cannot continue to cling to outmoded thinking."

Mr. Mahathir also ticked off residents of high-rise homes for persistent breakdown of elevators.

"This is because instead of pressing once, we press many times. And sometimes people waiting for lifts press the 'up' button and 'down' button. This causes the lift itself to be confused," he said to roaring laughter.

Mr. Mahathir then turned to neighbouring Singapore and said the situation in Malaysia was not that bad.

"But at least we are more civilised than some people in Singapore. These people urinate in lifts so the authorities have placed sensors to detect ammonia to catch the culprits. But we don't do it here," the New Straits Times quoted Mr. Mahathir as saying.

He said that high-rise living was the reality in Malaysia due to lack of land, especially in urban areas.

Shanghai public warned of sub-standard foreign food

SHANGHAI (AFP) — Shanghai authorities have warned the public against blindly buying imported foods, saying a large quantity did not meet Chinese standards, a newspaper reported Wednesday.

The Shanghai legal daily quoted the city's Imported Foodstuff Sanitary Superintendent Bureau as saying of 3.72 million tonnes of food imported through the eastern port in 1995, 200,000 tonnes did not meet national standards.

Last year, 2.53 million tonnes of food were imported, of which 80,000 tonnes were sub-standard, it added.

The variety of imported foods available in Shanghai has grown in recent years, rising from five per cent of all types of food available in the market in 1990 to 75 per cent last year, the report said.

It quoted officials from the bureau as saying although foreign food production used more advanced technology and the food was of better quality and taste than local produce, there was still a need to pay attention to hygiene standards. Some foreign businessmen exported food to evade strict sanitary examination at home and some foreign governments encouraged food exports by lowering export examination standards, the report alleged. It added expired food, polluted food, poor quality food and food which had gone bad were dumped on the Chinese market.

"They (homosexuals) have a lot of other choices. Let's confine them to their productive endeavours like being couriers and beauticians," Gen. Acedera said. He cited a law banning

Australian politician aims to revive euthanasia

SYDNEY (R) — An Australian politician on Wednesday began an attempt to revive euthanasia in the Northern Territory by amending laws to carry only a minor fine for helping a terminally ill person die.

Last month the Australian national parliament overturned the Northern Territory's voluntary euthanasia law — the world's only assisted suicide law.

Northern Territory politician John Bailey on Tuesday introduced legislation into the local parliament which, if passed, would result in doctors who helped terminally ill patients die being fined A\$50 (U.S.\$39).

"The (legislation) I am proposing...creates an offence called euthanasia," Mr. Bailey told Reuters by telephone from Darwin, capital of the Northern Territory.

"If a person admits to it, he or she will be given an infringement notice and fined A\$50 but no conviction will be recorded," Mr. Bailey said.

Four people used the Territory's euthanasia law

Elephant contraceptives stimulate sex appeal

JOHANNESBURG (AFP) — South Africa's Kruger National Park has scrapped a birth control project for female elephants after it backfired causing the tusked creatures to have a heightened sex appeal, a report said here.

A group of elephant cows implanted over a six month period with oestrogen hormones intended to prevent conception — had instead been left permanently on heat. Kruger Park veterinarian Douw Grobler told

Johannesburg's Daily Star newspaper. Sex-driven males had been seen crowding around the females, Grobler said, adding administrators of the sprawling game reserve had shelved the programme.

"At one stage there were eight bulls around one cow. This is unacceptable and that is why the implants were terminated," Grobler said. "At least we learnt from this and won't ever have something like

this happen again." Two baby elephants had disappeared, and were presumed dead, when their mothers strayed off while on heat, Grobler said.

Researcher Henk Bertschinger said a second birth control plan, in which elephant cows were immunised with pig "Pelludida Zona" proteins, was continuing in the park, and had so far prevented females from falling pregnant.

Comment by Philippine army chief on gays sparks debate

MANILA (AFP) — Remarks by the Philippines' military chief that gays will be banned from the nation's Armed Forces sparked a debate Wednesday in this largely Roman Catholic country.

A militant gay organisation, Progay Philippines, described the statement by General Arnulfo Acedera as "very discriminatory" while the military chief insisted that those found to be homosexuals would be fired.

"They (homosexuals) have a lot of other choices. Let's confine them to their productive endeavours like being couriers and beauticians," Gen. Acedera said. He cited a law banning

those who have homosexual tendencies from serving in the military.

But Edgar Allan Tolosa, head of the Progay Philippines, said on local television that about 50 officers in the active service are gays, but would not divulge their names.

"We cannot force them to come out in the open because they are breadwinners, they want to serve the people," Mr. Tolosa said, adding they would stage demonstrations if the gay officers were fired.

Gen. Acedera on Tuesday told reporters in the city of Lucena south of Manila that "we cannot have 'in-between' in the military service."

"We will have problems in organisation if we allow gays in the military," Gen. Acedera added.

Before Gen. Acedera's remarks, there had been little debate on homosexuals joining the Philippine military, but Progay Philippines and other gay groups have protested alleged discrimination at work and in public places.

Homosexuals are widely tolerated in this largely in the country but there are no special laws protecting their rights.

A proposed law calling for a representative from the gay community in the congress' house of representatives has failed to make progress.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Russia buys two supercomputers

MOSCOW (AFP) — Russia has bought two supercomputers from Europe, getting around a ban on U.S. sales, to guarantee maintenance of its nuclear arsenal, Atomic Energy Minister Viktor Mikhailov said Wednesday. Moscow "absolutely freely purchased the supercomputers in Europe" after Washington banned unlicensed sales, Mr. Mikhailov was quoted as saying by Interfax news agency. Supercomputer simulation became the preferred way to test nuclear weapons design after the signing of a Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. According to Mr. Mikhailov one computer was capable of 10 billion operations per second, the other five billion. The U.S. ban applies to computers with speeds above two billion calculations per second to Russian nuclear weapons designers, producers or storers.

Bangladesh courts face 577,300-case backlog

DHAKA (AFP) — Bangladesh courts face a backlog of 577,300 cases, some dating back 20 years, it was reported here Wednesday. Of the cases, 1,300 were appeals, 76,000 were with the high court division of the supreme court, and the remainder with the lower courts, the mass circulation Janakantha daily said. A World Bank report said Bangladesh lacked adequate judges, infrastructure and proper monitoring as well as suffering from procedural bottlenecks and excess holidays for judges in the higher courts. There were only 32 supreme court judges, including five in the appellate division, and they would each get 132 days holiday this year. Law Minister Abdul Marif Khasru blamed a lack of accountability and insufficient judges for the backlog, and said the government had initiated steps to improve the situation, including the appointment of new judges.

Cloned sheep to become mothers

LONDON (AFP) — The first sheep to be cloned from laboratory-grown cells are to become mothers, press reports said Wednesday. Megan and Morag, cloned by taking a cell from an embryo, were precursors to Dolly, the sheep whose existence aroused international controversy when it was revealed she had been cloned from a cell from a fully-grown adult. The Edinburgh-based Roslin Institute announced the sheep had both become pregnant by normal means, in an experiment designed to answer fears that cloned animals might not be able to conceive. Morag is due to give birth next month, while Megan's lamb is due in July. The independent newspaper reported that Dolly is likely to be mated next year.

French government rebuked on immigration

PARIS (R) — France's Constitutional Council on Wednesday struck down two provisions of a new law clamping down on illegal immigration in a rebuke to the centre-right government a month before a snap parliamentary election. The constitutional watchdog said the provisions, including one allowing police access to the fingerprints of applicants for political asylum, breached the constitution.

7 arrested in connection with gang rape

NEW DELHI (AFP) — Indian police have arrested seven men from rich and influential families in connection with the repeated gang rape of a 21-year-old girl, which turned her into a mental wreck, reports said Wednesday. The arrests were made Tuesday in Ghaziabad town, near New Delhi, following a complaint by the girl's father, a retired air force officer, the pioneer said. Senior superintendent of police Arun Kumar alleged the girl was used as a "sex slave" by the men who allegedly first raped her some two months back after luring her with the promise of a job. "Unable to bear the trauma, the girl developed acute mental illness," the officer said. She is now undergoing psychiatric therapy.

South Korean president gives up jogging

SEOUL (R) — South Korea's most famous jogger, President Kim Young-Sam, has given up his early morning runs. "President Kim quit jogging last week," an official at the presidential Blue House confirmed on Wednesday after newspapers splashed the story. "He has taken up swimming and walks around the presidential mansion." Doctors had been advising Mr. Kim, 69, that the daily jogging routine he had kept up for 30 years was too strenuous. "The president finally decided to listen," the official said. Mr. Kim ran three to four kilometres each day with 10 or so aides through the picturesque grounds of the Blue House. He would set off at 6:00 a.m. in summer and 30 minutes later in other seasons. He shared a workout run with U.S. President Bill Clinton in Seoul in 1993 and in the South Korean island of Cheju in 1996. He accompanied Philippine President Fidel Ramos on a jog in 1994.

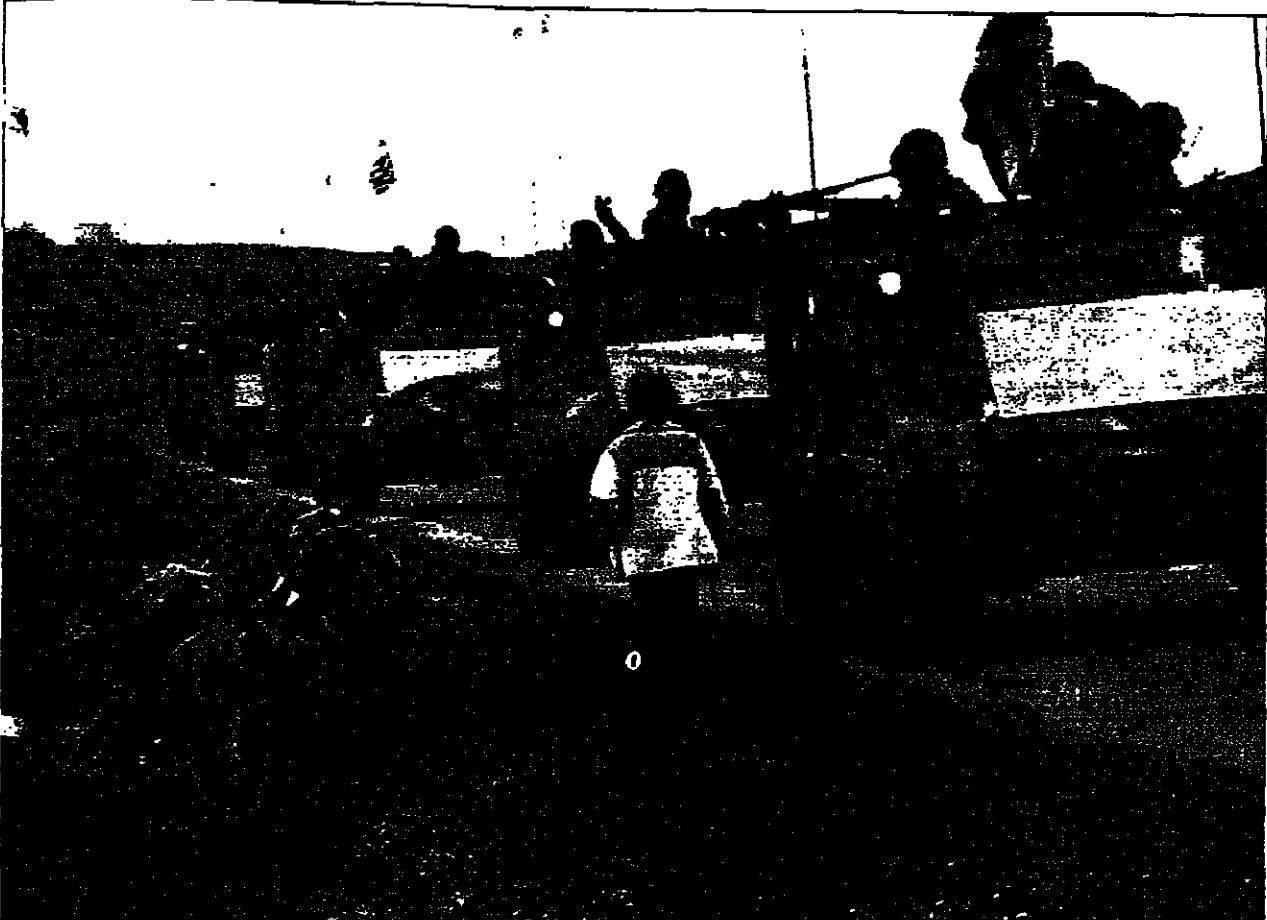
Long-distance from Poland to Pope

WARSAW (AFP) — A 61-year-old Polish former marathon runner set off Wednesday from Kalisz, central Poland, heading for the Vatican where he plans to arrive on May 18 after covering some 1,700 kilometres. Andrzej Jablonski is aiming to trot up Rome's St. Peter's Square just as Pope John Paul II says the Angelus prayer. He will pass on to the pontiff an invitation to visit Kalisz on the part of the townspeople. Mr. Jablonski is assured in advance of the response, since Kalisz already figures on the programme for the Pope's forthcoming visit to his native country in early June. The former runner has been preparing for the past six months for his trek, which he will cross the Czech Republic and Austria accompanied by two cyclists in support.

Nepal to send 2 rare rhinos to Britain

KATHMANDU (R) — Two single-horned rhinoceroses will be flown next week to Britain from Nepal where wildlife experts hope the rare beasts will breed in captivity, authorities said on Wednesday. The two female calves of 14 and 16 months are part of a global conservation drive for breeding the endangered species in captivity at the Whipsnade Wild Animal Park near London. The park already has seven rhinos of the same species. The one-horned Asian rhino is found only in the swampy grassland of India and Nepal. Nepali wildlife experts captured the two rhinos in March in the Royal Chitwan National Park, about 100 kilometres south of Kathmandu. Last year the Nepali government decided to donate two rhinos to the Zoological Society of London. But the transfer was delayed due to concern in Britain over bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), or mad cow disease. Beef exports from Britain were banned by the European Union in March last year after the brain-wasting bovine disease was linked to the human equivalent, Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (CJD).

World News



An Albanian boy walks his cows and donkey past a Greek convoy on the road between the Adriatic port of Durres and the capital Tirana April 23. Some 400 Greek soldiers arrived in Albania to join a multi-national force which aims to protect aid deliveries to the poor after an armed insurrection triggered by failed investment schemes (Reuters photo)

First flagship runs aground, then Italy gets bad EU news

ROME (AP) — First the flagship of the Italian navy ran aground off Albania while TV cameras rolled. Then Italy became one of the only two countries to fail the latest European Union (EU) report card on membership in the single currency club.

Rome on Wednesday was smarting after a one-two punch to its pride.

A miffed Premier Romano Prodi suggested the European Union commission ignored data furnished by his government.

The commission presented its forecast in Brussels that all 15 EU members except Italy and Greece will be able to join the union's single currency, the Euro, in 1999.

The EU criteria include a 3 per cent or less deficit to gross domestic product ratio in 1997; Italy's was forecast at 3.2 per cent. Greece's at 4.9 per cent.

Prodi said it was "incomprehensible" that the commission would predict now that Italy would miss the target "after the state has already adopted the measures necessary to reduce the deficit to 3 per cent of GDP."

Prodi was referring to recent deficit-cutting measures to bring down the ratio from its current level of about 3.8 per cent. Last year, the ratio was 6.8 per cent.

But staunch opposition from Prodi's hardline communist allies has thwarted more ambitious plans to further slice away at budget-draining expenses such as Italy's generous pension and social services benefits.

Indeed, the EU report card forecast that, without these severe cuts, Italy's deficit-to-GDP ratio would rise to 3.9 per cent in 1998.

Prodi counts on the small communist refoundation party to give his centre-left coalition a majority in the chamber of deputies. Leaders of the main coalition party, Italy's former communists, have been speculating that Prodi may try for a fresh mandate with new elections.

"In Brussels, they know that it's not Italy that deserves to be left back but the Prodi government," said Gianfranco Fini, a leader of the opposition Freedom Alliance.

It would be a keen embarrassment if Italy, a founding member of the EU and in the G-7 club, did not qualify for the Euro.

Failing the EU report card came as Italy is trying for a higher international profile by leading a multinational force across the Adriatic in Albania.

The military mission, the first led by Italy in post-war times, aims to restore order in the Balkan nation, which has been rocked by three months of anarchy, so humanitarian aid can be safely delivered.

On Tuesday, just as Italian troops were arriving in large numbers in the tiny port of Vlora, the heart of the Albanian insurgency, the cruiser Vittorio Veneto sat stuck on a sandbar. Four tugboats pulled and pulled for hours before the flagship of the Italian navy was yanked free on Wednesday.

"Poor Albanians, at least we gave them a few laughs," read an editorial cartoon on the front-page Wednesday of Rome's Il Messaggero.

Chirac buries hatchet to fight polls

PARIS (AFP) — President Jacques Chirac sought Wednesday to unite all sides of his rightwing coalition to fight snap elections, as opposition socialists said the right was running scared even though polls put them ahead.

As a new survey indicated his ruling conservative majority will be re-elected, Chirac notably buried the hatchet with a key old friend turned rival, to unite his forces ahead of the ballots late next month.

In a symbol of his need to pull together all his forces, he had lunch with former Premier Edouard Balladur — his erstwhile "friend of 30 years" who split the right by challenging Chirac in 1995 presidential ballots.

The reconciliation between the two men is emblematic of Chirac's need to heal old wounds to ensure no slip-ups in what will be a short and sharp campaign against a leftwing with nothing to lose and everything to gain.

In theory Chirac, as president, would normally be above party political campaigning for the elections to the 577-seat national assembly, which are seen as a huge political gamble by the French leader.

But he entered the fray openly Wednesday telling his ministers in their weekly cabinet meeting: "You must... go out and meet the French people to tell them your convictions, your energy, your confidence, your enthusiasm."

And in a clear reference to Balladur he continued: "You must contribute, along with all the members of a majority which is rich in figures of quality — and that is its strength — to fuel a new impetus for a new elan."

Chirac has called snap polls for May 25 and June 1 in order to win a fresh parliamentary mandate to continue reforms and take France into Europe, and specifically into a single European currency next year.

The socialist opposition, which was routed in the last legislative ballots in 1993 which gave the left barely 20 per cent of seats in the national assembly, is hoping to seize back power in the forthcoming ballots.

The first poll since Chirac announced the elections gave the left little comfort: It predicted that the right will win 332 seats against 221 for the left-wing alliance.

The CSA poll gave support for the right — comprising the Gaullist Rally for the Republic (RPR) and Centrist Union for French Democracy (UDF) — at 37 per cent, up two points on a poll by the same institute two weeks ago.

But Socialist Party (PS) leader Lionel Jospin said Wednesday that the polls did not tell the whole story, alleging that Premier Alain Juppe was running scared.

In particular he blasted Juppe's "aggressiveness" in attacking the socialists' past record in government rather than trumpeting his own record. "I wonder if it hides nervousness," he said.

"I really do have the impression that they are confused, and are treating it like a game of poker."

The forthcoming campaign risks being dominated by Europe: Chirac is determined to take France into a single European currency next year, while Jospin has said he will put France's economic interests first.

Chirac's meeting with Balladur followed a dinner hosted by Premier Alain Juppe on Tuesday ahead of the formal launch of his campaign platform.

Virtually the only absentee was Thatcherite ex-minister Alain Madelin.

"The right's fanfare," trumpeted the mass-market France-Soir Wednesday over a front-page picture of the assembled rightist luminaries putting aside their differences.

One interesting result from a CSA poll concerned French people's views on Chirac's decision to call elections, criticised by some as motivated purely for his own political expediency.

Although overall backing the right for re-election, the poll also indicated that 81 per cent of French people believe Chirac has launched a "political manoeuvre" by calling the snap ballots.

Bees wiped out by unseasonable Bosnian snowfalls

SARAJEVO (AFP) — Bosnian bees are being wiped out by unseasonable snows which have blanketed the country, said officials on Wednesday.

The bees, coming out of hibernation, have been hit by 20 centimetres of snow falling around the Bosnian capital.

Many are dying because their keepers cannot struggle through the snow to feed them the sugar they need when coming out of hibernation, said the agriculture ministry.

"There are cases of the bees dying because the bee-keepers are unable to reach the bees in time," agriculture ministry official Mesud Ribic told the daily newspaper Oslobođenje.

Crops are also suffering, say officials, jeopardising the country's war-ravaged economy.

Snowfalls, the heaviest for this time of year in more than a century, have brought chaos to the roads, with the NATO-led Stabilisation Force (SFOR) reporting many routes are temporarily closed.

And Sarajevoans are freezing because gas was cut earlier this month over a dispute over an unpaid bill.

The Croats and Muslims have paid their share of the bill to the Russian suppliers of the gas, but the Serbs have refused. Rather than pay the Serb part of the bill, the Muslim-Croat federation told the Russians to turn off all supplies earlier this month, as spring weather beckoned.

A French embassy armoured vehicle carrying the French ambassador and the German charge d'affaires collided with a civilian car near the town of Travnik because it slid on ice Tuesday, said the French embassy in Sarajevo. An embassy official said there were no casualties and the driver of the Bosnian car was slightly hurt and went to hospital for precautionary checks.

A total of 31 people were injured in Sarajevo on Tuesday when a tram caught fire after officials said melting snow short-circuited the motor.

Poll boosts Conservative Party in U.K.'s May 1 election battle

LONDON (R) — A new poll showing a dramatic plunge in the opposition Labour Party's lead on Wednesday electrified the campaign for Britain's May 1 election, turning what had seemed to be a certainty into an open race.

The ICM poll in the Guardian newspaper slashed Labour's lead from 14 to just five points, the first time the opposition's advantage has fallen to single figures since November 1993.

Prime Minister John Major declined to comment, saying polls were "of no use" in determining how his campaign was going.

But Conservative strategists said the poll showed Major's tactic of focusing on Europe was working despite splits in his own party over policy on a single European currency.

Conservative chairman Brian Mawhinney said the party's own private polls had shown Labour's lead at less than 10 points every day in the past week — well below published polls.

Opposition Labour Party leader Tony Blair also declined to comment, saying: "There's only one (poll) that counts — that's the one on election day," he told a London news conference.

But Labour economics spokesman Gordon Brown pointed to a Gallup poll in Wednesday's Daily Telegraph putting Labour 21 points ahead, an increase of five points in a week, saying: "There's so many polls, you have to take them with a pinch of salt."

ICM defended its methods on Wednesday as other polling organisations urged caution, suggesting the result could prove to be a "rogue" and Labour's support could bounce back.

But bookmakers William Hill said they had cut the odds on the Conservatives winning the May 1 election to 7-2 from 9-2.

Labour's odds lengthened to 1-6 from 1-8 and the odds on a parliament with no overall majority were cut to 9-2 from 5-1.

Labour officials said on Tuesday night they were worried the six-week campaign was boring voters and playing into the hands of the Conservatives.

Labour believes this was exactly Major's intention when he called the campaign, the longest in 80 years, on March 17.

Blair tried to break through what aides called the "media wall" on Tuesday night, dispensing with prepared speeches to give an impassioned, unscripted appeal for a chance to govern.

"The election is about the soul of this country," Blair said, calling on 700 supporters in a concert hall to the north to launch a "crusade" to change this country for the better in the eight days left to the May 1 poll.

Blair kept up the momentum on Wednesday, pledging to create a one billion pound (\$1.63 billion) fund for innovative health and education projects from the proceeds of Britain's lottery.

But Major, clearly buoyed by the poll, hit out at Labour's plans to set up a separate parliament for Scotland.

Major attributes his come-from-behind performance to win the last election in 1992 to his staunch defence of Scotland's place in the United Kingdom and is determined to hammer home the same message as the 1997 campaign enters its last eight days.

At a news conference during a campaign visit to north-east Scotland, Major said Labour's plans to devolve power to a parliament in Edinburgh would risk jobs and could lead to the break-up of the United Kingdom.

N.Korea says 'lunatic' defector must be expelled

TOKYO (R) — North Korea on Wednesday broke its silence on defector Hwang Jang-Yop's arrival in South Korea, angrily calling for the expulsion of a "lunatic" whose criticisms of Pyongyang it said amounted to a war declaration.

"Our people curse and despise both the crazy Kim Young-Sam regime and Hwang Jang-Yop, a class a criminal and common enemy of the North and South Korean people," said the official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) in a statement attributed to a pro-North group in South Korea.

Hwang, who reached Seoul on Sunday after seeking asylum in South Korea's embassy in China two months earlier, slandered the North in arrival remarks scribbled by South Korean security officials, KCNA said.

"The 'statement' is nothing but an outcry of a crazy man sick with paranoia, eccentricity and mental derangement, and a jargon of a traitor who has been trained abroad for more than two months into a parrot of the 'agency' for national security planning," said the report, which was monitored in Tokyo.

Upon arrival in the capitalist South, the 74-year-old former top communist ideologue called North Korea "an abnormal system, a mix of socialism, modern feudalism and militarism."

Mobutu tells Mandela he will not go to South Africa

KINSHASA (AFP) — Zairean President Mobutu Sese Seko has told his South African counterpart Nelson Mandela he will not go to Cape Town for talks with rebel leader Laurent Kabila, his son and spokesman said Wednesday.

Nzanga Mobutu said the ailing president had spoken with Mandela late Tuesday and told him he would not fly for health reasons, but that he remained committed to direct talks with the rebel chief.

Mandela informed him that the rebels had proposed a meeting in Lubumbashi, Zaire's second city which was captured by rebel forces two weeks ago.

"It's not what you would call a neutral zone," Nzanga Mobutu told reporters, saying neighbouring Congo remained the president's favoured option but that talks on a venue were ongoing.

"Congo is neutral. South Africa is neutral, Lubumbashi is not," he added. "We hope they will have somewhere else to propose."

Rebel forces already control the eastern half of Zaire and are advancing on the capital Kinshasa. Kabila has pledged to take the city in June.

Nzanga Mobutu said the president wanted democratic elections to be held. The rebel leader says the only talks he wants are on the manner of Mobutu's departure after 32 years of dictatorship.

"This meeting is very important for both sides. The sooner will be the better," Nzanga Mobutu said.

"We need peace in this country, that is why the president is willing to meet Mr. Kabila. We want to be sure that, on the rebel side, they want true negotiations and they want peace."

On the health of his 60-year-old father, who is recovering after prostate cancer surgery in August, Mobutu said he was "okay. He sees his people and staff every day."

"On the president's side, I can tell you (his health) is not an excuse" to avoid Kabila.

Earlier, in Cape Town, a foreign affairs spokesman said Mobutu's special adviser Honore Nghanda Nzambo was expected in South Africa later Wednesday carrying a message from the president, an official said.

Spokesman Pieter Swanepoel told AFP Nghanda could be carrying Mobutu's reply to Mandela's invitation last week for the president to hold face-to-face talks with Kabila in South Africa.

Nzambo added, had asked to see Deputy President Thabo Mbeki, one of the mediators in the Zairean civil war.

Gunfire crackles as Manila and Muslims talk peace

MANILA (R) — Philippine government negotiators and hardline Islamic guerrillas resumed peace talks on Wednesday aimed at nailing down an elusive peace on southern Mindanao island, as their forces battled in nearby hills.

At least 30 Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) rebels and two soldiers have died in fighting in the past week in the island's Zamboanga Del Norte province, and an army commander said his troops were pressing their attack on the rebels' mountain lair.

"The offensive will go on until we clear the area," Colonel Glicerio Sua told reporters, referring to an MILF camp in the mountain town of Sirawai, which government forces have been shelling since Saturday.

As the army advanced, exploratory talks between government negotiators and an MILF panel resumed about 200 kilometres to the east in Cotabato city.

Heading into the talks, MILF chief negotiator Ghazali Jaafar said the continuing military operations cast doubt on the government's sincerity in the peace talks.

"Our talks on how to forge a ceasefire are still stagnating. Some people say it is an illusion," he said.

"To make things worse, these soldiers engage our forces in gunbattles and later go to the media to accuse us of provocation," Jaafar told reporters before the start of the closed-door talks.

The MILF, with a fighting force estimated by the military at between 6,000 and 8,000, is the larger of two rebel splinter groups still waging a guerrilla war despite a peace accord signed in September between Manila and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNL), the largest of the island's Muslim guerrilla groups.

President Fidel Ramos is seeking a separate deal with the MILF, which continues to fight for an Islamic state in a region regarded by the country's five million Muslims as their ancestral homeland.

The Philippines is predominantly Catholic.

Eight months after Ramos and MNL chief Nur Misuari embraced each other at the signing of the peace accord in Manila, hopes among Muslims and Christians that peace and economic development would come to the war-ravaged area appear to have been premature.

Fighting with breakaway rebel groups continues, kidnapping-for-ransom gangs terrorise Mindanao cities and infrastructure remains a mess, businessmen said.

"Peace has remained very elusive," Wilfredo San Luis, vice-president of the Zamboanga Chamber of Commerce, told Reuters.

"We are very cautious in all aspects. Many people are still reluctant to invest... businessmen are afraid of getting kidnapped or receiving extortion letters," he said.

President Ramos, who has promised a \$2.1 billion development programme for poor areas in Mindanao, ordered a fast-tracking of projects after meeting MNLF leaders in Manila on Wednesday.

Jordan Times

An independent Arab political daily published in English by the Jordan Press Foundation

Established 1975

محيطات للصحافة العربية مؤسسة للصحافة العربية

Chairman of the Board of Directors:

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Jordan Press Foundation,

University Road, P.O. Box 6710, Amman, Jordan.

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Telex: 21497 ALRAI JO

Facsimile: 696183

The Jordan Times is published daily except Fridays.

Subscription and advertising rates are available from the

Jordan Times advertising department.

The View from Academia

Investment in tourism — will the dream come true?

Dr. Ahmad Y. Majdoubeh

FOR SOME time now we have been talking about investment in tourism as a dream which, upon materialisation, will make our lives remarkably better than they are at this point. We have also been assuming, at times even asserting, many things in this connection: that such a dream is indeed possible, that we are up to the challenge of making things work, that we have something to offer to tourists from the country and from abroad, that we have been taking serious steps to improve the conditions for investment (removing red tape, black tapes, brown, yellow, orange, and so on), that we are clearing the air, preparing the way, explaining ourselves, marketing ourselves, signing agreements, that things are happening and beginning to happen, etc.

Well, let me share with you two moments of my last tourist experience over the Eid holiday, by way of illustrating a few points in connection with the topic at hand, some positive and some negative. It was the first time we decided to go on a trip over the Eid, having come to the ingenious conclusion (after years of devoting the two Eids to relatives and friends) that from now on one Eid was for relatives and friends and one for ourselves. I will spare you the details of the trip but will confine myself to the parts and incidents which illustrate a point.

The first decision (dilemma?) was: to decide where we should go. Come to think of it, there are not that many places in the country to spend the Eid at, or any other holiday for that matter (let's distinguish here between a weekend and a holiday). The one and only place that comes to mind (especially if you have kids and want them to have some fun) is Aqaba. After several phone calls to tour agents and hotels, we were convinced of the hopelessness of the attempt to book a room. So we gave the whole idea up. A colleague (a professor of sociology) told me the other day that he had decided to chance it and go to Aqaba in the hope of finding some place to stay. "I was sure I could find a room somewhere. Well, I was wrong. My friends and I (thank God I did not take my kids) ended up sleeping on the roof of an unfinished building. Aqaba was so packed with people, one could not enjoy the experience."

We ended up going to Hurgada, in Egypt. The hotel where we stayed, a tourist village, is bigger than all hotels in Aqaba combined. The swimming pools, for children and

adults, were so spacious and the beach was so huge, we never felt crowded. There were so many finished hotels and there were so many new ones (especially tourist villages) being built; one is really impressed. Upon inquiring the tour guides as to the reason behind the amazing number of hotels and villages under construction, I was told it was a natural result of the elimination of investment barriers (something we are still dreaming about achieving).

The scarcity of places to go to in Jordan and the shortage of vacant rooms at our hotels are things for our tourism officials to ponder about. Why should one be forced to spend a vacation abroad when one wishes to spend it at home?

In addition to places, there is the matter of activities. Sea resorts have to offer more than swimming and beaches for a person who plans to stay more than a couple of days. Most hotels in Hurgada have a variety of things to offer, each seems to have specialised in offering something: scuba-diving courses, arranged basketball and volleyball games, work-out gyms, golf courses, an exciting submarine trip, trips to nearby islands, night shows, etc. The folkloric night show at the "Alf Layla Wa Layla" hotel is both an unforgettable entertainment experience and an excellent introduction to Egyptian culture.

The second point I wish to raise has to do with the airport experience, which is important for any traveller. The Queen Alia International Airport (QAIA) is excellent in many ways. For one thing, people stand in line, and the lines move relatively fast. At Hurgada Airport (and this is something that airport officials there have to work on), the lines are not at all respected.

The airport employees at QAIA are generally friendly and courteous. Not always though. The Royal Jordanian employee who stood checking boarding passes at gate 12 of Building II the morning of April 16, for example, was a horrible exception to Jordanian hospitality and courteousness. He has come, it seems, not with the intention to facilitate business but to give people a hard time. It seems that this person has a problem with humanity (or with Royal Jordanian itself), and he has come to settle accounts with the passengers. Not only did he not smile or not know how to say excuse me, may I help you, etc., he was speaking in a visibly rude manner, scolding passengers for not moving as quickly as he wished when he ordered them to board

(for instance). He also seemed to hate children: a 2-year-old child who happened to put the hands on the window pane and look at aeroplanes excitedly is, according to him, bent on destroying the airport, and he had to remind the child's mother that she had not done a good job in "bringing him up" and to keep him at her side. More important than this: he was giving contradicting and false instructions ("commands" actually) to passengers. His behaviour was, fortunately, balanced by that of the police officer who was standing next to him and who was so friendly, courteous and nice that the Royal Jordanian (RJ) employee (on whose shoulder and the shoulders of the likes of him our tourism industry lies) could have learnt civility from him. One does not want to get into other tiny details which are important to passengers who plan to have some fun on vacations (the worst types of abuse are actually the subtle ones which cannot be described easily), but the RJ employee reminded me of one of my sergeants at the military training camp I attended for a week when I was an undergraduate student a couple of decades ago.

The point here is that the success or failure of tourism in our country depends a lot on the behaviour and attitude of the employees involved in it — investment in tourism has a lot to do with investment in the various types of people involved in it. We cannot build an excellent airport or build an excellent airline company and forget to choose carefully the employees who know how to deal with people. I am sure that there are many courteous, polite and efficient RJ employees, unlike the one who stood, sergeant-like, at gate 12, Building II, the morning of April 16, who will set a better tone for a holiday. People like the one I mentioned should be sent to work in the archives.

In Hurgada, the various service employees — from the janitor to the tour guide, the waiter, the hotel manager — were on the whole excellent. One feels that they are out there to do one simple thing (which is all that one really wants): serve without bothering — and not to boss or give hard time.

I guess what I am saying is simple and obvious: our dream of benefiting from tourism cannot come true unless and until we offer: a) enough space and activities for tourists and b) quality services and quality employees. Otherwise, let us just forget tourism and focus on something else.

Netanyahu — a hostage of religious parties, right wingers

By G. H. Jansen

THE DECISION of the Israeli Attorney General Elyakim Rubinstein not to charge Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for the criminal offences of fraud and breach of trust on the ground that there was not sufficient evidence to indict has neither cleared the premier of wrongdoing nor cleared the air of the acrid aroma of political scandal.

"Stink" was the word used by the former Labour foreign minister, Ehud Barak, to describe the air round the scandal involving the attempt, in January, by Netanyahu and his entourage to appoint Jerusalem Lawyer Ronnie Bar-On, an eminently unsuitable candidate, to the key post of attorney general so he would secure a plea bargain or pardon for Arieh Deri, head of the Sephardi Orthodox Shas Party, who is on trial for corruption.

Indeed, the Rubinstein report may have even added an acid whiff of its own to the noxious mixture of gasses hovering over the Israeli body politic. Dissatisfied with the report, the leftist Meretz Party and various Labour Party leaders have submitted appeals to the Israeli Supreme Court to overturn the attorney general's decision to end the investigation into Netanyahu's doings. They have been spurred to take such action by the mildness of the report.

If Netanyahu was not indicted, Rubinstein and his colleague, State Attorney Edna Arbel, were expected to sternly rebuke the prime minister and his colleagues for wrongdoing on the brink of criminality. But the legal luminaries did not even do this. Their report speaks of "substantial suspicion" that criminal breaches did occur and complained about the lack of cooperation displayed by Netanyahu and his colleagues who told police investigators that they could not "remember" what had happened a couple of weeks before they were interviewed by the police. But Rubinstein and Arbel did not use strong language or decide to follow up on their suspicions or press

the politicians over lapses of memory. This is in itself suspicious, to say the very least.

And sad. Because most Israelis have very high regard for Rubinstein personally, both as a competent lawyer and an "honest man". Perhaps too many have, however, forgotten that, under orders from former Likud Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, Rubinstein, while serving as Israel's negotiator in Washington, did his very best to stall and create deadlock on the Palestinian track of the peace process. This proves that Rubinstein, an honourable civil servant, takes orders without question. What is more, he comes from a conservative, observant background, similar to that of Netanyahu's Likud supporters. Could an atom of the smell of favouritism be detected?

While refusing to even rebuke Netanyahu, Rubinstein and Arbel indicted Arieh Deri for fraud, breach of trust and extortion. Deri's followers are furious, asking how he could have been indicted if he had no partners in the alleged conspiracy. Whom did he threaten? Whom did he defraud? The Shas Party has also filed a complaint with the Supreme Court.

Shas, with ten seats in Israel's parliament, the Knesset, is the cabinet-maker because Shas' ten members are crucial to either Likud or Labour when forming a coalition. Deri has been dubbed the "indispensable man in Israeli politics". Therefore, displeasing Deri can be a dangerous business. Particularly if he decides to withdraw Shas' support from a government. The sole indictment of Deri has also given rise to charges from the Eastern Sephardic Jewish community that "Sephardim are the scapegoats while (the Western) Ashkenazim get off with nothing." So there is also the scent of racism attached to this scandal.

Although most Israeli observers now believe Netanyahu's government will survive for the time being because his ministers have decided to stick by him and not stampede out of the cabinet, the sordid scandal has been

transformed into a protracted struggle. This struggle can only further discredit the prime minister, debate Israeli politics, ruin Israel's reputation abroad and harm the peace process.

Netanyahu responded to the attorney general's report by proclaiming that he had been cleared (although this is not true) and promptly launched a verbal onslaught on the media, which broke the scandal, and the police, who investigated it, in an attempt to undermine their impartiality and credibility. This is a very dangerous tactic which can only also undermine the structures of the state itself.

Netanyahu's opponents are vowing to keep up the pressure on his government on the legal, parliamentary and political levels. They will continue to try to use this scandal to bring down his government, the most inept in Israel's history, for two reasons. First, during his ten months in office he has adopted a highly personalised U.S. presidential style of rule which has bypassed both cabinet and Knesset, undermining Israel's parliamentary form of government. And he has tried to fit his own men into the bureaucracy, army, police and business, with the objective of taking over these institutions from within. The problem is that Netanyahu's appointees have shown scant respect for democratic norms or honest administration. His constituents, drawn from the artisan, lower middle and working classes — Oriental Jews living in under-developed towns, observant Jews who hate secular Labour, dissatisfied Russian immigrants, taxi drivers, clerks and factory labourers — are more interested in striking out at Labour than in clean and effective government. They support "King Bibi" because he does just this.

The second reason is that Netanyahu's Likud, which has only 32 seats in the 120 seat Knesset, can stay in power only as long as he has the support of the three conservative religious parties in his coalition — which have 23 seats. They have made their support contingent on the adoption of certain demands — strengthening the monopoly of the Orthodox rabbinate, closing down the country on the Sabbath, funding religious schools. "Hirsh Goodman of 'Jerusalem Report' characterised the transformation begun under Netanyahu as a "revolution" which would change Israel's modern, open, tolerant society into a reactionary, intolerant society dominated by the Ultra Orthodox rabbis, Israel's "ayatollahs".

Thus, the struggle now being waged in Israel is not only political but civilisational. It is a struggle over the soul of Israel and the way its people conduct their lives. This struggle began when the first Jewish settlers — some secular, others religious — landed on the coast of Palestine a century ago, but Netanyahu's dependence on the religious sector of society and his willingness to give in to their demands, has shifted the balance of power established at the time Israel won its independence in 1948.

The "Bar-On" scandal has exacerbated this shift by weakening the already weak Netanyahu and making him more than ever a hostage of the religious parties and right wingers in his own Likud. On the peace front, they want Netanyahu to renege on the commitments Israel made to the Palestinians in the Oslo accords, which are anathema to both his religious and right wing coalition partners who have no intention of "sharing" the promised land with the Palestinians. Netanyahu has already stated flatly that Jerusalem will remain Israel's exclusive capital, that he will continue to build the controversial settlement on Jabal Abu Ghneim/Har Homa near the Holy City and that the Palestinian should forget about establishing their own state. Palestinians are now speaking of the "lingering death" of the peace process while the Arabs promote the re-isolation of Israel and resumption of the economic boycott. Corruption could thus collapse the peace process.

LETTERS

The price of democracy

To the Editor:

READING THE article "Poverty drives Bulgarians to Romanian potatoes" (Jordan Times, April 21, 1997) struck a painful note. As a native Bulgarian, I feel sad and deeply concerned about the future of the Bulgarians who are presently poverty stricken. After the demise of the Communist regime in 1989, Bulgaria has chosen the road to a free-market economy, political reform and democracy, following the example of other former East European countries. For almost two continuous years after the tremendous shift took place, Bulgarians did nothing but chanted slogans in favour of political and economic reforms, enjoying the bliss of a newly-born democracy and freedom of speech, something they had been deprived of for a long time.

The market was flooded with foreign imports that soon became unaffordable for the majority, while local manufacturers and huge factories were closing down facing bankruptcy. Carried away by their dreams of foreign aid and infatuated with the feeling of freedom, the average Bulgarians, however, did not realise that their so-called "new rulers," former top-ranking Communist officials, had firmly grasped power, but this time under a different banner. Knowing well the rules of the game and controlling government key positions, they got rich with every passing day by ripping off the country's wealth and betraying its people in the name of democracy and pledges they never honoured.

Eight years have elapsed since the totalitarian regime was toppled, yet the country and its people have not witnessed a single bright day ever since. On the contrary, statistics indicate a collapse in all aspects of life. Twenty per cent of the population are retired people who live on a miserable pension that can hardly secure their daily bread. At the same time, unemployment rates exceed 15.5 per cent, while the average monthly salary is less than \$14. More than 40 per cent live under the poverty line and registered birth rates have never been so low since war times.

Foreign investment ranks lowest in Bulgaria, in comparison to other East European countries who undergo a similar process of transformation. Health care is far below the standard and the security of the citizens is in constant jeopardy. In other words, chaos reigns supreme and a once reasonably secure and healthy community is being transferred to an inferno where only the leaders of organised crime, drug dealers, pushers and all sorts of corrupt people flourish and survive.

Western political analysts often give credit to the government's wise policies in dealing with the economic, political and ethnic crisis, which, they say, avoid the start of a civil war. I think they are wrong. It is the Bulgarian people who deserve all the credit for their incredible patience, tolerance and peace-loving attitude they have demonstrated throughout the years.

A question imposes itself here: Are the old regimes still to be blamed after eight years of transformation, economic hardships and political failures? Somehow, somewhere, corruption started and spread like cancer, leading to the need for a change and better life. However, what the world sees today is a nation on the brink of a national catastrophe. Never have Bulgarians during Communist rule been exposed to such humiliating circumstances as they are forced to bear today. Betrayed by constantly changing governments and the West who pledged support but hardly delivered, impoverished and disillusioned Bulgarians nostalgically remember the "bad old days," when unemployment and poverty were unknown, when education, medical and social care were free of charge for everybody, when women enjoyed a dignified social status and maternity rights, when the state provided security for its citizens and children enjoyed their innocence. Ironically, those old advantages seem to be better than the present and what appears to be the near future for many Bulgarians.

If this is the price of democracy, is it really worth it?

Rumiana M. Nuseibeh, Amman.

Society on the Move

Band wagons, babes and bankers

It's been a lacklustre week for the most part, but perhaps one area deserves attention, Karak. When one thinks of Karak, several images come to mind: a Crusader castle, August clashes, and powerful clans. The latter appears to be the concentration of the moment, with Jordan's two largest Arabic weeklies, *Al Ra'i* and *Al Dustour* focusing reports last week on the starting of electioneering fever in what some are calling the country's centre of power. There, where nine seats are to be filled in the parliament, already around 150 people are getting ready to declare their candidacies. Observers look at the numbers as a reflection of societal phenomena. Some say that the numbers demonstrate a personal need on the part of several prospective candidates to measure their sphere of influence in their community and among their tribes. They believe that others are planning to run for office because they still believe that they can return favours. Still, with the statement by His Majesty King Hussein that the practice of appointing ministers from the elected House should be abolished, many analysts expected that there would be fewer House hopefuls. After all, a great many people still believe that their destiny is to be made a minister and that a surer ticket to that seat is through the House of deputies. The numbers coming in from other parts of the country, albeit haphazardly at this stage, appear to some to be indicative of a new national trend. In the early stages, the flurry of activity surrounding those who may seek public office may be healthy in creating community consciousness and team spirit, say some sociologists. But they warn that all too often the latter stages of campaigning can lead to fragmentation. With the date of the elections still unannounced, we've much observing to do.



HRH Princess Basma Wednesday discusses joint projects with United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Deputy Executive Director Stephen Lewis at the Queen Alia Fund for Social Development (Petra photo)

FOCUS CHILDREN: Meanwhile other organisations and their officials were busy conducting or planning several important meetings and events. Mr. Stephen Lewis, Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) ends his two-day visit to Jordan today. On Wednesday he met with HRH Crown Prince Hassan and discussed the importance of not reducing U.N. services in areas where changes in the structure of a related agency are planned. The Crown Prince referred specifically to areas which affect refugees, children and the underprivileged. Prince Hassan underlined the need to respect refugees' rights and that U.N. organisations and agencies in Jordan dealing with refugees should work in unison to guarantee these groups' welfare. The Crown Prince reminded Mr. Lewis of the value of implementing the U.N. General Assembly's call for a new humanitarian order. That initiative was proposed by Prince Hassan himself in 1981. Mr. Lewis earlier met with HRH Princess Basma and reviewed projects implemented by the Queen Alia Fund for Social Development (QAF) in cooperation with UNICEF, particularly in the field of children's clubs and kindergartens. Princess Basma referred to the kindergarten teachers' guidebook which was prepared by the two organisations in collaboration with the Ministry of Education. She also discussed a project for promoting the establishment of kindergartens by non-governmental organisations throughout the Kingdom. Mr. Lewis was also scheduled to attend a UNICEF Regional Management Team meeting and meet with several other officials and ministers. He was also expected to visit to the National Task Force for Children. Mr. Lewis is a Canadian national with an illustrious career spanning teaching in Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya and Uganda, serving as an elected member of the Ontario legislature and as

Canada's ambassador to the United Nations, and as U.N. Special Advisor on Africa. He is the recipient of 14 honorary degrees from Canadian universities and several awards including a special human rights award "in recognition of his dedication and contribution to the cause of human rights" from the League for Human Rights of B'Nai B'rith Canada. In 1993, former U.N. Secretary-General Boutros Ghali asked Mr. Lewis to join his Advisory Group on the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in September 1995. In October 1995, Mr. Lewis became Deputy Executive Director, External Relations, of UNICEF headquarters, New York. During April 1996's process of internal organisation, the title was changed simply to Deputy Executive Director. UNICEF's Regional Director Farid Rahman and Area Representative Mrs. Domitilopaue Stahl last night hosted a reception on the occasion of Mr. Lewis' visit at the Intercontinental Hotel which was attended by senior government officials, and principals from various NGOs.

PUSHING FREE TRADE: Friedrich-Naumann Foundation (FNF) is expanding its scope by diversifying its activities in Jordan and working more regionally. Thus its scheduled international conference on "The Reality of Free Trade - WTO accession" According to foundation representative in Jordan and Lebanon Dr. Ulrich Vogt, as a liberal foundation, FNF wants to contribute to free trade and look at inherent problems and obstacles to it. Two important developments, Jordan's signing of the partnership agreement with the European Union last week, and the expected accession of the Kingdom to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) are

focuses of the planned event. The conference agenda includes presentations by a varied line-up of experts from the Middle East and Europe. The opening session speakers include, Deputy Prime Minister for Development Affairs Jawad Anani, Dr. Zeki Fattah, chief of the development issues and policies division of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), Jorgen Lissner, U.N. resident representative of the United Nations, and Dr. Vogt. The session will be chaired by MEBA Economic Business Consultants Director Riad Khouri. Other guest speakers include former GATT Director General Arthur Dunkel who will talk about the WTO as a decisive step towards a global trading system. ESCWA WTO (GATT) Regional Advisor Dr. Mohsen Helal, the counsellor in the Accessions Division responsible for the working party on Jordan's accession, Hector A. Millan, Ministry of Industry and Trade Secretary General Mohammad Smadi, First Under Secretary of State of the Ministry of Economy in Egypt Dr. Ali A. Soliman, General Director of the Ministry of Economy and Trade in the Palestinian National Authority Dr. Saeb Bamie, and Jordan Export Development and Commercial Centres Corporation Director General Dr. Mohammad Halaiah. The conference begins Monday and continues Tuesday with working sessions on the agricultural, textile and clothing industries. The event will culminate with a reception hosted at the new offices of the FNF in Um Ushaina. Dr. Vogt also plans to move the foundation further into the areas of market economy, private initiative, human rights, democratisation, women's rights, media as well as the environment (an area that was heavily focused on by his predecessor Walter Rüdell). The conference will be held at the Intercontinental Hotel.

PLANS FOR A ROAD SHOW: Citibank/Jordan is welcoming two of its senior officials to Amman this week for talks with senior economic officers to "reaffirm the bank's long-standing commitment to the country and to encourage investments in Jordan." From his base in London, Executive Vice President of Citicorp/Citibank Dennis R. Martin, and from his base in Bahrain, Gulf & Levant Regional Director of Citibank Mohammad Al Shroogi will be in town next week for meetings with Citibank/Jordan General Manager Suhair Al Ali Dabbas, and senior government and private sector officials. According to Mrs. Al Ali-Dabbas, Citibank is planning to promote Jordan's investment opportunities in an early June "road show" on the U.S. Northeast coast cities of New York, Boston and Hartford. The "road show" which is being supported and endorsed by both the Jordanian and U.S. governments is geared to familiarise potential U.S. investors with Jordan. Citibank, considered the largest U.S. investor in the Kingdom, has been in the Jordanian market since 1974 and was the only U.S. bank to withstand the mid-80s Central Bank of Jordan requirement to increase their capital. Today, after facing the ups and downs from the 70s through to the 90s, that capital base stands at JD 10 million. Apart from one staff member, its two Amman branches employ 74 Jordanians. Messrs. Martin and Al Shroogi are on a regional tour that is taking them to Lebanon, Dubai, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, as well as Bahrain and Jordan. Mrs. Al Ali-Dabbas, who has been with Citibank since 1981 and served as the general manager of the bank's affiliate Saudi American Bank in New York, is hosting a dinner Saturday evening for her visiting colleagues, local officials, clients and other parties.

A SERIOUS LOOK AT MS: The Binational Fulbright Commission in Jordan, headed by Alain McNamara, today hosts an important lecture on the occurrence, distribution and control of the chronic progressive disease, multiple sclerosis, in the Middle East. The lecture will be presented by Sami Khoury, professor of medicine and the University of Jordan's Department of Community Health, and Rajiv Sethi, an American Fulbright Fellow, graduate of neuroscience from Brown University in the U.S. and currently affiliated with the University of Jordan. The theme of their lectures will be "New Directions in the Study of the Epidemiology." Dr. Khoury will speak about "Modern Epidemiology," focusing on methodology and providing some examples. Mr. Sethi will tackle "The Environmental vs. the Genetic Risk Factors" in the epidemiology of MS in the Middle East. Mr. Sethi, who has been conducting research with Dr. Khoury as part of his fellowship aim, explains that because much of the early research into MS was conducted in Nordic Caucasian populations in Europe and the U.S. it was seen mainly as a genetic disease. But with studies started 10-15 years ago, MS was found in other areas as well. But Mr. Sethi's interest is why does MS appear to be more predominant in one area as opposed to another. This is where the suggestion of the environmental risk factor comes in and thus the topic of his lecture. The lecture begins this afternoon at 4:00 p.m. at the Fulbright House in Shmeisani. The session will be followed by a question and answer period.

Jennifer Hamarneh

'The furnace of doubt'

Beirut Blues
By Hanan Al Shaykh
London: Vintage, 1996, 279 pages, £6.99

BEIRUT BLUES is about a struggle. Not the struggle between various militias in the later phases of the Lebanese civil war, though this is the backdrop of the novel. Not the struggle of the Lebanese people to survive amidst the violence engulfing their country, though the book paints a rich panorama of their daily lives. No, Beirut Blues is about struggle with the self. The main character, Asmah, feels herself set apart from others. She is torn between conflicting loyalties to various family members and to friends on opposing sides of the war. She feels torn between the different faces of Lebanon. Most of all, she is in conflict with herself and highly unsure of her own feelings — who she is, what she wants, whom she loves, trusts and respects. In this struggle with the self, the war is a catalyst, casting Asmah into the "furnace of doubt... within range of the

magnet which drew everything towards it" until she "arrived at the essence of things" (pp. 181 and 195).

This is Hanan Al Shaykh's third novel, originally published in Arabic as *Barid Beirut* (Cairo: Dar Al Hilal, 1992). Like in her first book, *The Story of Zahra*, the plot unfolds via first person narrative by the female protagonist. But in *Beirut Blues*, the protagonist's character and narrative technique are different and arguably more mature. Zahra was a very young victim of a dysfunctional family and violent society, only able to react to events, and spitting out her story in desperate bits and pieces. Asmah is an educated young woman who examines her feelings in eight mental letters, each constituting a chapter of the novel, which she addresses to friends, lovers, her grandmother, the war, the land, Beirut and Billie Holiday. While the impact of Zahra's story is incredibly gripping, Asmah's is reflective, conveying valuable insights into human nature and social reality in a hierarchical, divided society.

The main setting of Zahra's story is the rooftop of her

family home, and it never goes beyond the confines of the Shiite community in the southern districts of Beirut. Asmah is also Shiite, but her family is better situated and the scope of her life is far broader. She moves between east and west Beirut, and her grandparents' village in the Beqaa, mingling with Christian, Muslim, Palestinian and expatriate friends — journalists, returning emigres, militiamen and professionals.

In addition to Asmah's inner tension about her own identity, a recurring theme in the novel is the contrast between life in the city and on the land, and between different images of Beirut itself. It is here that the author's mastery of simile and metaphor are most clearly exhibited. When returning to the village, Asmah writes in her letter to "My Dear Land" that: "Beirut is far away now, like a blazing ember which we dare not approach even in our thoughts, for fear of being burnt..." (p. 72). In other passages, the image of the city is one of human warmth where "all the events took place in an area like a walnut, contain-

BOOK REVIEW

ing hollow chambers which interlocked but were sealed off from each other" (p. 155). Asmah sees the Palestinian resistance as having enhanced Beirut's character: "My city... had begun to pulsate with life like cities with long histories, Cairo for example. Characters emerged who seemed eternal and had some kinship with the half-collapsed walls, apartments which had previously dreamt only of the smell of food and the rustle of soft dresses became houses for convictions, ideas, where people could breathe freely and make love" (p. 62). But Al Shaykh reserves her most beautiful imagery for the land which is portrayed as ultimately stronger than the war. Writing to the war, she says: "As we penetrated the calm of the small back roads, the rocks in their varying colours and formation rapidly buried all traces of you" (p. 183). This gives the book a tone of optimism and faith in the future, which sets it apart from Al Shaykh's previous novels.

Sally Bland

Life At The Crossroads

A History Of Gaza
By Gerald Butt
200 pages \$24.95 Rimal Publications, Scorpion Cavendish.

SINCE JANUARY, when Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel and the Palestinian National Authority president, Yasser Arafat, sealed the long awaited agreement to redeploy Israeli troops in Hebron and for Palestinian self-rule, the authority's main seat in Gaza comes into central focus. Could this tiny strip, squeezed along the Mediterranean coast between Israel and Egypt and packed with nearly a million inhabitants, become the nucleus of Arafat's projected Palestinian state?

To attempt an answer, you need a lot of historical, economic and demographic information, not easily available between two covers. Gerald Butt, a distinguished British correspondent, born and brought up in the Middle East and educated in London, has provided considerable such information in his slim but incisive book. He has used classical historical research, a tool most newsmen neglect these days, to connect Gaza's

long and turbulent past to its more familiar present.

Gaza is known to some recent visitors, like Amira Hass, a courageous Jewish woman and Israeli journalist who lived and worked in this pressure-cooker of Palestinian nationalism for three years, as "Arafat's kingdom by the sea." Gerald Butt's opening description of Gaza is more history-minded: a "land of many battles."

One battle was concluding when a Catholic priest, one of Butt's historical witnesses, visited in 1918 and found that "Gaza was a very lamentable spectacle," all in ruins and rags. Turkish occupiers had just suffered defeat in World War I. The British and Allied forces of General Allenby were in control. The Gaza Strip was now incorporated into the British-mandated territory of Palestine. In 1949, Gaza yielded to Egyptian military occupation. This would last until Israel's victory over the Arabs in June 1967 overcame feeble Egyptian resistance and fierce but brief resistance from the Palestine Liberation Organisation.

The densely packed middle-class population of a few thousand permanent Gazan residents, largely merchants and professionals, augmented by hundreds of

thousands of uprooted Palestinian refugees from Israel and beyond, coalesced into a human knot of hatred and resistance to Israel's occupation. This culminated in the intifada, the revolt of stone-throwing young men and children in 1987.

Realising that Arab Gaza, the cradle of Arafat's Al Fateh and many more radical Palestinian resistance organisations, was ungovernable by Israel, the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's ruling Labour Party was happy to withdraw — leaving only the enclaves of a few Israeli settlers, some in luxurious resort settlements, guarded by the army. Now, with Arafat and his police in charge, the rest of Gaza and its hard-pressed people, largely denied access to the jobs they had grown dependent on in Israel, face a politically free but economically bleak era.

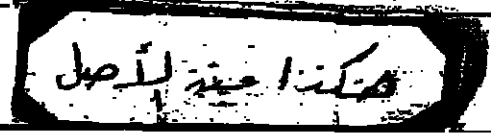
A great merit of this book is that Butt places the grim present and uncertain future of Gaza in historical perspective. His first 10 chapters conduct us through the periods of the Biblical Philistines, Egypt's Pharaohs, Babylon's Nebuchadnezzar and assorted other early rulers of Gaza, from Judas Maccabee of the Jewish nationalists to Rome's Pompey and Herod. The Knights

Templar, succeeded by Arab, Turkish and Mameluke rulers, carry the turbulent drama, easy to imagine as a film, down to the 20th-century struggles of Israel and Palestine.

Fortunately, a wide array of Arab and non-Arab governments, including the United States, as well as charitable groups and entities like the World Bank, are now releasing public funds and encouraging private investment to rebuild every aspect of life in Gaza. The territory, as the author assures us in his opening paragraphs, suffers at the end of the millennium "from an image problem." This is certainly an understatement.

What most Gazans must now consider is how any future new Palestinian state, combining Gaza and the West Bank, can somehow be helped to elbow its way, via a less tense and more neighbourly relationship with Israel, to the honourable place among nations to which its people aspire — *International Herald Tribune*.

John K. Cooley



Don't let me be misunderstood

By Jean-Claude Elias

ALL THE hype in the media about Internet, the widespread usage of personal computers, the dramatic technological improvement at both hardware and software levels in the last four or five years associated with the equally dramatic drop in prices, all these indicators may lead you to think that everybody now understands PCs, likes them, lives in perfect harmony with them and makes excellent use of the machines. Such a rosy image doesn't unfortunately correspond to reality.

Whereas some users, whatever their age, have become real computer experts not to say addicts, other still look at PCs like mysterious tools in the best case and sorcerers in the worst. The most pragmatic just ignore them. I couldn't find any figures or statistics that would indicate, for a given country, what proportion of the population is computer literate and what isn't, but I know for a fact that reality is not as bright as one could expect it to be. From personal experience I would say that in the U.S. for instance, 25 per cent of the active population only is computer literate and in Jordan about 15 per cent.

Apart from lack of technical knowledge, many still don't understand the system: What can it exactly do? What are its limits and when is it better to do things using a computer and when it is better to do them manually. The gap between the "educated" and the "illiterate" becomes even wider if you're talking computer communications and networks like Internet. It took me some time last week to explain to a friend, who otherwise has been using computers for a couple of years for his word processing, what "downloading" software over the Internet meant. It simply consists of "bringing" (receiving, transferring) software over the telephone line, via the modem, and saving it on your PC's hard disk like any other file or files for future use.

Then we have the usual segregation. Men still consider computing like a male privilege though it has been shown that women can be as good as if not better programmers than men. What is true is that men tend to spend more time than women — about three times more according to PC Magazine — working (or is that playing?) with computers.

chip talk



Companies like Microsoft are trying hard to put one PC on each table and each desk. To make personal computers as ubiquitous and familiar as cars and TV sets they are developing long-term strategies aimed at making the machines even easier to use and able to accomplish a greater variety of tasks.

In the meantime, readers will allow me to reproduce the following, very "macho" text that was E-mailed to me by a friend a few days ago, and that clearly shows that even in the apparently neutral field of personal computing sexism has its place. More seriously it also shows that computers are still misunderstood by most people.

Six reasons computers must be female...

1. As soon as you have one, a better one is just around the corner.
2. No one but their Creator understands their internal logic.
3. Even your smallest mistakes are immediately committed to memory for future reference.
4. The native language used to communicate with other computers is incomprehensible to everyone else.
5. The message, "Bad command or file name" is about as informative as: "If you don't know why I'm mad at you, then I'm certainly not going to tell you."
6. As soon as you make a commitment to one, you find yourself spending half your paycheck on accessories for it.

Oh... what an upside-down world we live in!

By Samer Ghaleb Bagaeen

THERE ARE many kinds of people in this world. Those who are rich: those who are members of governments; those who have influential friends and relatives; those who are nothing and should therefore stop complaining about how messy and tough life is and those who think that they can change the world when in fact they can't change a single thing.

Then there are the nerds, the geeks, and the rocket scientists. These are the people whose business cards read "Chief Scientist" and "Chief Technical Officer." These people are twenty-something. They have their own languages: C, JAVA, Pascal, and their own dialects: C++, Objective C, and Visual C.

They come in every shape, size, and gender. Some are chubby, sporting imperfect personal hygiene along with thick eyeball-magnifying lenses.

Others are blonde, expensively perfumed, and stylishly costumed. They have bad haircuts and perfect hairdos, expensive Italian suits and stained ripped T-shirts, old jeans and linen slacks. They wear Birkenstock sandals, sneakers, and brown suede shoes.

They carry expensive laptop computers in black nylon shoulder bags, backpacks, leather cases, worn plastic shopping bags, expensive aluminum cases and cheesy cloth bags screen-printed with the names of computer trade shows.

They carry Newton Pads, Pilots, palm-sized video cameras and digital still cameras. They are the brains behind Microsoft, Intel, Apple, Sun, Netscape, and Hewlett Packard.

Some are shy and withdrawn in general company, while



in nerdy circles, their eyes shine and they speak with evangelistic fervour.

Meanwhile, in the West, educated productive people whose parents had worked for 35 years for a reliable firm, find themselves down-sized, right-sized, redundant or just plain canned.

In the Third World, families live in wrenching poverty. Their cardboard homes adorned with the logos of the state-of-the-art computer factories where their relatives work for pennies an hour.

So there you have it. At the end of the day, it is the nerds and the geeks who have got it made in a world where nothing really matters and where nothing counts instead of everything.

It no longer is 'put up or shut up,' it has become 'put up and shut up.' But cynicism is cheap, and if it is what is expected from us, if dithering has become the accepted norm of behaviour, then we will use it seriously and with relish.

ON THE LIGHTER SIDE

Mohammad A. Shuqair

LET'S CHAT IN ARABIC

- ** Allow me to offer you this present.
Ismah lee an oqaddim laka hathheil hadiya.
- ** Will you take a cup of coffee or tea?
Hal tored finjanan minal qahwa am ash'shay?
- ** Ask what you please.
Otlob ma yasurroka.
- ** I'm at your service.
Ana fee khidmatik.
- ** Permit me to express my gratitude.
Ismah lee an o'abbir an shukri.
- ** I fear I'll be burdensome to you.
Akhaaf an othqil alaik.
- ** This is not my business.
Laysa hatha shughli.
- ** I don't meddle with such things.
La atadakh'al fee omoor kahathehi.
- ** Sorry, I don't mean it.
Assif, la aqsid thalek.
- ** I beg your pardon.
La mu'akhh'tha.

BANK OF KNOWLEDGE

1. How much sweat does the human body release in an ordinary day?
2. What is the living creature that never moves at all?
3. Which planet has a big red spot on its surface?
4. Which are saltier: the tears of joy or the tears of grief?
5. Where is the Leaning Tower of Pisa situated?
6. Is polygamy permitted in China?

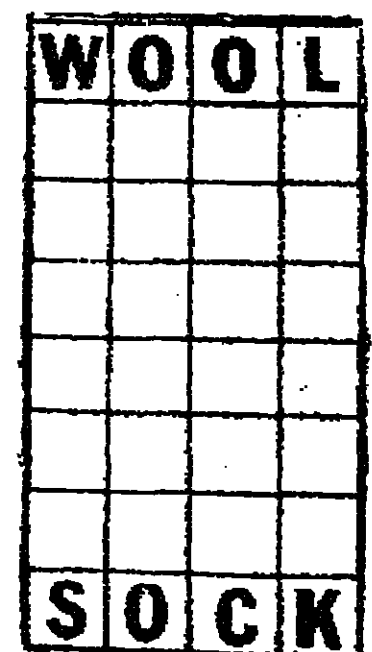
THE LANGUAGE OF FLOWERS

Fern — You fascinate me.
Forget-me-not — The same as the name.
Foxglove — I bow down to you.
Geranium — To console you.
Golden Rod — Be on your guard.
Heliotrope — I am devoted to you.
Hyacinth (White) — Your beauty is recognised.
Ivy — Faithfulness. I cling to you.

PUZZLES

(A) WORD CHANGES

Can you change the top word to the bottom word by inserting the missing words?
Change one letter and make a new word in each move.



(B) FLOWER POWER

Each dot represents a flower in this field. Can you work out how many the little girl has picked?



JTV CHANNEL 2 WEEKLY PREVIEW

Thursday, April 24, 1997

2:00 The Holy Koran
2:05 Ovide & The Gang
2:30 Raw Toonage
2:45 Curiosity Show
3:10 They Came From Other Space
4:00 NBA Basketball
5:00 Out Of This World
5:30 French Programmes
7:00 Le Journal
7:15 French Programme
7:30 News headlines
7:35 Parenthood
8:00 Cinema, Cinema, Cinema
8:30 The American Chart Show
9:10 Kung Fu — The Legend Continues
10:00 News In English
10:25 Feature Film — Love Among Thieves
Starring: Audrey Hepburn & Robert Wagner

10:00 News In English
10:25 Easter Parade (Special Programme)
11:15 Sisters

Monday, April 28, 1997

2:00 The Holy Koran
2:05 Flintstones (Cartoon)
2:30 Captain Planet (Cartoon)
3:00 French Programmes
4:00 Nature's Inventions (Doc.)
4:25 Ocean Girl
4:50 Night Of The Red Hunter
5:00 Extra Dimensions
6:00 French Programmes
7:00 Le Journal
7:15 French Programme
7:30 News headlines
7:35 One Foot In The Grave
8:00 Secrets Of Science (Doc.)
8:30 Murder She Wrote
9:10 Highlander
10:00 News In English
10:25 Under Suspicion
11:15 Middle March

Tuesday, April 29, 1997

2:00 Holy Koran
2:05 Budgie — The Little Helicopter (Cartoon)
2:30 Grimmy (Cartoon)
3:00 French Programmes
4:00 Super Sport Follies
4:30 Dog House
5:00 Preserving For The Taste Of It (Doc.)
5:15 The Album Show
6:00 French Programmes
7:30 News Headlines
7:35 Ellen
8:00 Tilt 23.5
8:30 Encounter
9:10 Assignment Earth (Doc.)
10:00 News In English
10:25 Snowy River
11:15 Mission Impossible

Wednesday, April 30, 1997

2:00 Holy Koran
2:05 Flintstones
2:30 Adventures On Rainbow Pond
3:00 French Programmes
4:00 America's Funniest People
4:25 Spell Binder (New)
4:50 Challenge (Doc.)
5:15 Bordertown
6:00 French Programmes
7:00 Le Journal
7:15 French Programme
7:30 News Headlines
7:35 Grace Under Fire (Doc.)
8:00 Soldier's Diary
8:30 Challenges
9:10 Spenser For Hire
10:00 News In English
10:25 Cobra
11:15 Hert To Hert

Friday, April 25, 1997

2:00 The Holy Koran
2:05 The Mask
2:30 Flintstones
3:00 How To Draw Cartoon
3:30 Winners Down Under (Doc.)
5:00 French Programmes
7:00 Le Journal
7:15 French Programme
7:30 News Headlines
7:35 America's Funniest Home Videos
8:00 The Health Show
8:30 Hawkeye
9:10 The Power of Dreams
10:00 News In English
10:25 Feature Film — Fight For Justice
Starring: Marilu Henner & Doug Sarank

Saturday, April 26, 1997

2:00 The Holy Koran
2:05 Adventures Of Mickey & Donald
2:30 Moomins (Cartoon)
3:00 French Programmes
4:00 Gillette (Sports)
4:30 Innovation (Doc.)
5:00 Tilt 23.5
5:25 Blue Heelers
6:00 French Programmes
7:00 Le Journal
7:15 French Programme
7:30 News Headlines
7:35 Hangin' with Mr. Cooper
8:00 Magazine Zero One
8:30 Prism
9:10 Time Trax
10:00 News In English
10:25 MacGyver
11:15 Hymn For Peace (Concert)

Sunday, April 27, 1997

2:00 The Holy Koran
2:05 Jonny Quest (Cartoon)
2:30 Problem Child (Cartoon)
3:00 French Programmes
4:00 The Global Family (Doc.)
4:25 Energy Express
4:50 Our World, Their world (Doc.)
5:15 Clear Water — Big Fish
6:00 French Programmes
7:00 Le Journal
7:15 French Programme
7:30 News Headlines
7:35 Fresh Prince Of Bel-Air
8:00 World Echo (Doc.)
8:30 Side Effects
9:10 Nautilus (Doc.)

Sydney Opera House development sparks protests

By Richard Pullin
Reuters

SYDNEY — To many in Sydney and around the world, the view of the Australian city's famed, white-sailed Opera House is part of the magic which makes Sydney's harbour one of the world's most beautiful.

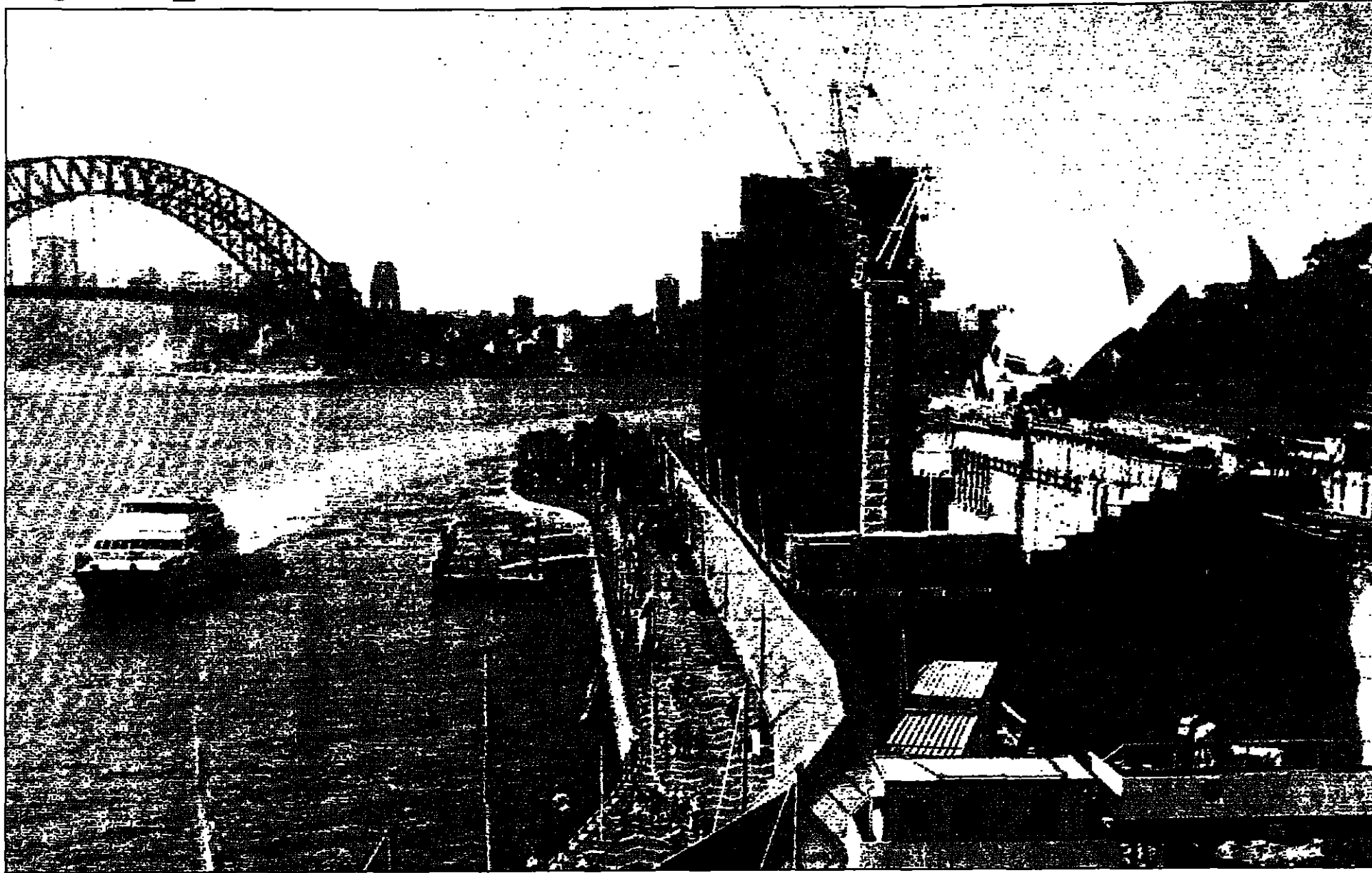
But plans to build a series of multi-storey apartment blocks close to the Opera House have threatened to mar that view permanently, sparking a fiery public outcry.

"It's just a terrible mistake," said Jack Munday, a former union leader who led a five-year campaign in the 1970s to preserve an historic district on Sydney's Circular Quay, which cradles the harbour.

Critics of the plan say the apartment blocks will be a blot on one of the city's most scenic and well-known waterfront sites. The area is a key attraction for tourists and will form the backdrop for the 2000 Olympics, when the eyes of the world will be on the city.

Work on the first 15-storey building on the eastern arm of the quay has prompted two demonstrations on the steps of the Opera House. Newspapers and radio stations have been flooded with caustic criticism of the project.

Opponents have urged the New South Wales state government to halt the 700 million Australian dollars (\$550 million) project, either by buying back the site, offering a land swap, or pushing for a single high-rise tower set well back



The construction site of a multi-storey apartment block threatens to mar the view permanently of the white-sailed Sydney Opera House. The plan has sparked a fiery public outcry as the magic of one of the world's most beautiful harbours is said to be threatened (Reuters photo)

from the Opera House.

The developers argue that the site has housed commercial buildings since 1807, and the development will be lower than the 1950s high-

rise buildings that once lined the quay.

Opponents say development will block views but opponents say the development, which will include a

two-storey covered walk-

way to the Opera House with cinemas and cafes, will be too high and too wide.

They say that will mean

an end to views from the

quay of the nearby Botanical Gardens and will block many of the approach views of the Opera House.

The building, which

perches on the tip of Bennelong Point jutting out onto Sydney Harbour, is famous worldwide for its unique design, often likened to a series of overlapping white sea-shells or sails.

"The Opera House is one of the most three dimensional buildings in the world," said Sydney architect Neville Gruzman, who heads the East Circular

Quay Committee.

"It depends a great deal for its magic on the way the views of the shells change as you move towards it."

Protests take off as work begins public protests kicked off earlier this year when work started on the first apartment block nearest the Opera House.

"The public have suddenly seen this disastrous building," Mr. Gruzman said. "They couldn't imagine what it was going to be like."

About 3,500 people turned out for the second rally on the steps of the Opera House earlier this month and more than 30,000 signatures have been collected opposing the project.

But the government has already ruled out purchasing the site, arguing that the 800 million Australian dollars needed to buy it could be better spent on schools and hospitals.

Mr. Gruzman said the most practical alternative would be a 40-50 storey tower at the end of the site furthest from the Opera House.

But developers say they will not consider any changes to the project, which is on schedule for completion in 1999. Approval for the current design was given in 1994 after years of tortuous negotiations.

Most of the site is now owned by luxury hotel and property group Hong Kong.

Theatre critics turned directors told to keep night jobs

By Jill Serjeant
Reuters

LONDON — Actor Valentine Pelka said it was like being shipwrecked on a desert island. And for once, the theatre critics agreed.

In an unusual experiment designed to cool the age-old animosity between actors and critics, four British theatre reviewers have crossed the footlights to direct a play and subjected their erstwhile victims.

"It has been a fairly monumental struggle. I doubt very much whether the four involved will want to do it again," said Ben Chamberlain, spokesman for the "critics up for review" season.

The idea of pitting the so-called "luvvies" of the theatre world against the men with the poison pens was dreamed up by theatre producer Lawrence Elman after a heated argument with Evening Standard critic Nicholas De Jongh.

Director Michael Bogdanov later weighed in with a ferocious newspaper attack on critics as "vicious, vitri-

perative, vitriolic and toady-

ing." So it was a brave quartet of reviewers that turned up at London's fringe Battersea Arts Centre (BAC) four weeks ago to start rehearsals of their own chosen plays with a cast of professional actors and designers.

De Jongh, directing a Jean Anouilh play, said it was one of the most awful ordeals of his life.

"I felt at times like a long stroll on a narrow tightrope with fear of being laughed at whenever I tumbled," he said. "Every critic should go through the fire of the experience."

The cast concurred. "We are a tribe on a desert island. He has got shipwrecked," said Valentine Pelka bluntly.

"It has been very interesting finding out how little critics know about getting a play on. On the whole, it has been a terrifying experience," agreed actress Faith Brook.

Keep your night jobs, critics told

The eminent cast of directors who swapped roles to

review the results advised the critics not to give up their night jobs.

Stephen Daldry, director of London's experimental Royal Court Theatre, conceded that De Jongh had "acquired himself with credit."

But in a sarcastic prelude relished by many an actor savaged by a bad review, Daldry confessed he was a terrible critic who had done everything wrong.

"I turned up on time and forgot to complain about my seat. I sat in the middle of a row and forgot to scribble furiously... I did not rush out of the auditorium at the curtain call pretending I had an urgent deadline to meet," he wrote.

Guardian newspaper critic Michael Billington had a similar baptism of fire.

"Michael Billington started his rehearsal in an absolute shambles of a room... and he thought 'my God this is impossible. We can't possibly rehearse in here,' but that's where artists who are developing have to work," said BAC director Tom Morris.

Playwright Mark Raven-

hill described Billington's staging of a short Strindberg play as "pedestrian" and said the director struggled to keep up when his Harold Pinter production entered murky waters.

Former National Theatre chief Sir Peter Hall initially entered into the project with gusto.

But he soon had misgivings after other critics dismissed the venture as amateurish and struggling actors attacked it for diverting much-needed funds away from real theatre.

"I thought it would be fun — a sort of world turned upside down experiment that might raise awareness and get space for the theatre," Sir Peter wrote in his review of Times critic Jeremy Kingston's production of a little-known Michael Tremblay piece.

But Sir Peter regretfully did not like the play itself and gave Kingston only five out of 10.

"I would advise Mr. Kingston not to give up his night job. And I'm sure he will give the same advice to me. It honestly wasn't worth all the effort," he

wrote.

De Jongh said the experience had changed his outlook and made him more willing "to tap the milk of human kindness a little more frequently."

But the theatre world was mostly unmoved.

Bogdanov welcomed the fact that critics had been given a glimpse behind the curtains but said he had not changed his low opinion of them.

"My feeling about English theatre critics is exactly the same. They don't, a lot of them, have very much knowledge of what goes into the making a production," he said.

The Royal Court's Daldry resisted the temptation to wreak revenge but questioned whether the project was not merely "an exercise in parasitic media claptrap."

"Perhaps we should condemn this event as an obscenity given the difficulty genuine emerging directors have in getting their work resourced and seen," Daldry wrote.

Art show recalls happier Franco-Belgian golden age

By Paul Taylor
Reuters

PARIS — "How do you shoot a Frenchman?" goes an old Belgian joke. "Aim above his head and you hit him right in the middle of his superiority complex."

Franco-Belgian relations sometimes seem like a caricature of the love-hate relationship between a big country used to throwing its weight about in the world and a smaller one with a nagging inferiority complex.

The French have long revelled in "Belgian jokes" that make their northern neighbours out to be slow-witted buffoons. The Belgians reciprocate with a caustic humour depicting the French as arrogant and too clever by half.

Relations have soured beyond a joke this year over French carmaker Renault's decision to close its only factory in Belgium, throwing 3,100 people out of work.

France is meanwhile shielding from Belgian justice a top industrialist, Serge Dassault, wanted in Belgium for allegedly bribing politicians to win a big aviation contract.

So a new exhibition at Paris' Grand Palais, which moves to Ghent in September, is a welcome reminder of a more harmonious period when Franco-Belgian cross-

fertilisation and emulation inspired some of the greatest European art.

"Paris-Brussels, Brussels-Paris" chronicles the prolific artistic dialogue between the two countries in the second half of the 19th century — the age of realism, impressionism, symbolism and art nouveau.

French artists, writers found liberal refuge in Brussels French and Belgian artists, writers and composers were often first appreciated in each other's country before making a breakthrough at home.

Libertarian Brussels provided a welcoming political asylum for such French artists and intellectuals as the painter David, exiled for having voted to execute King Louis XVI, and later the writer Victor

Hugo when they were undesirable in France.

Hugo fled Napoleon III's 1852 coup and settled in Brussels until he was expelled in 1871, the year of the Paris commune, when bourgeois Belgium feared being contaminated by revolution.

Belgium's intellectual avant-garde and thriving art market drew French painters whose works initially scandalised Paris, such as Courbet, Manet, the impressionists and the pointillists.

Among the most active Belgian artistic groups were the "Cercle Des XX" and "La Libre Esthetique," both created by Octave Maus, which exhibited modern French art and staged music by composers such as Massenet and Debussy.

French poets Baudelaire, Verlaine, Rimbaud and Mallarme were attracted both to the free living of Brussels and to the Gothic mysticism of old Flemish towns.

French authors regarded as scandalous at home found publishers and patrons in Brussels, although Baudelaire was bitterly disappointed and wrote a diatribe against "poor Brussels," which was never published.

Belgian artists found fame first in Paris.

The sculptor Rodin spent six formative years in Brussels in 1871-77, where he decorated the wealthy city's booming bourse and created his first masterpiece, the stunningly realistic male bronze nude "I Age d'Airain."

The exhibition shows how French sculptors such as Carpeaux, Dalou and Lambeaux drew inspiration from Rubens' monumental canvases of writhing pink flesh.

The Franco-Belgian exchange illustrated by curators Anne Pinget of Paris' Musee d'Orsay and Robert Hoozee of the Museum of Fine Art in Ghent was not quite a dialogue among equals.

The receptiveness of Belgian circles did a lot for French art... Belgian interest in French creativi-

ty awakened in return a curiosity among the French about the Belgians. But Belgium never really had an artistic influence on France," Hoozee said.

The Belgian James Ensor was in his way as great a painter as Manet, but he did not exert the same international magnetism.

Yet Pinget argues that Belgium did achieve that eminence at the turn of the 20th century, when Horta, Mueha and Van de Velde were the driving force of art nouveau, the high-point and probably the culmination of half a century of cross-pollination.

However she notes that many Belgian artists achieved fame first in Paris, citing the author Maeter-Linck, whose play Pelleas And Melisandre inspired Debussy's opera, and the social realist Constantin Meunier.

The show, part of a Franco-Belgian season that includes two other travelling exhibitions — one on Rodin in Belgium and one on the Belgian poet Emile Verhaeren — stops at the eve of World War I, which effectively broke the privileged artistic links.

For much of the 20th century, France and Belgium have given the impression of living with their backs to each other, politically and artistically.

French people tend to think of Brussels, less than two hours away by high-speed train, as the capital of Europe rather than of Belgium nowadays.

There is something hauntingly topical about Meunier's giant paintings and sculptures of downtrodden working-class heroes at a time when a French employer is throwing Belgian workers on the dole.

If Meunier were alive today, he might well be painting the striking car workers of Vilvoorde, occupying their assembly plant in a doomed fight to save their jobs.

New film focuses on corruption at heart of Europe

By Jeremy Lovell
Reuters

BRUSSELS (R) — Graft, greed, corruption and attempted murder are not normally the everyday fare of the European Commission, but a new film called The Commissioner has a plot steeped in scandal and intrigue at the heart of Europe.

The film, starring British actor John Hurt, is backed by Belgian, British and German money and shot in London, Brussels and Cologne.

"I read the script and I liked it. It is a political thriller of a rather superior nature. The characters are better drawn than usual," Hurt told Reuters in between takes on a rainy Saturday morning in Brussels.

"It is very topical. I am in favour of Europe but I am worried if it is going to be a Europe led by a single country — Germany," he

said.

In the film Hurt plays James Morton, a British government minister married to an American who is forced to resign because of a scandal and is then hastily shipped to Brussels to be a European commissioner.

Once there he is handed the industry portfolio and finds himself right in the middle of a web of international intrigue and corruption concerning illegal chemical weapons, involving big business and reaching up to the commission president.

Film plot revolves around sex, intrigue

Hurt's character starts a passionate affair with Environment Commissioner Helena Noguentes, played by rising star Rosanna Pastor, and together with informant Koenig, played by

Armin Mueller-Stahl, they try to expose the scandal.

But powerful forces are ranged against them. Morton's house in Brussels is bombed and Koenig arrested for treason.

Then luck — or what seems like it at the time — intervenes and the plot is exposed, toppling the president of the commission and elevating Morton to the job.

However, the plot then twists once more and Morton — who believes himself to be an accomplished manipulator — finds himself out-manipulated and once more at the centre of a plot hatched by industry moguls who will stop at nothing.

The £10 million (\$16.2 million) film, based on a novel by Stanley Johnson who has been connected with the European Commission for two decades, is being directed by George Sluizer who began as assis-

tant director on Around The World In Eighty Days and whose directorial credits include The Vanishing.

"The direction is very good," Hurt said on the set outside his character's Brussels house in the wealthy Avenue Moliere which, having just been bombed according to the film's plot, was strewn with bodies, ambulances, police cars and fire engines.

"I have spent most of my life in film, and it is my life's love although I also enjoy the stage," said the star, whose 60-odd major films include The Elephant Man, Midnight Express, Alien, The Hit and, more recently, Rob Roy.

Film to be released in 1998

The commissioner will finish filming at the end of April in Germany — where

most of the backing money has come from.

It will then go into the cutting rooms and, according to co-producer Christina Kallas of Berlin-based Metropolis Filmproduktion, be released in time for either the 1998 Berlin or Cannes film festivals.

"A film takes many years from start to finish. You start with the idea, then the many versions of the script, then you have to find the funding and cast it. Only then can you start thinking of filming," she said.

"We started developing this project in 1992," she added as she and fellow producer Luciano Gloor briefly swapped their roles for those of extras in the bombing scene.

Kallas was philosophical about appearing as an extra in the final version of the film. "It always ends up on the cutting room floor," she said.

U.S. firm tests potential fat-burning drug

SAN FRANCISCO (R) — A U.S. company is testing a drug that potentially could help obese people lose weight by raising their metabolism, a researcher said.

Robert Dow, principal research investigator with pharmaceutical company Pfizer Inc., said obesity could be treated either by limiting food intake or by increasing energy use.

That is usually done through exercise. But Pfizer has developed compounds that in animal trials boosted metabolic rates to mimic the "exercise effect" of increased calorie burning without exercise. The tests showed a 10 to 30 per cent jump in metabolic rate.

A higher metabolic rate leads the body to slowly burn extra fat.

"If you have a 10 per cent increase in energy expenditure, you're potentially looking at about a half pound (230 grammes) a week drop in weight," Dr. Dow said in a statement from the American Chemical Society. Dr. Dow presented his findings at the society's meeting in San Francisco.

In animal trials of the new compound, Dr. Dow said researchers had seen no increase in food intake to match the higher metabolism.

"If I go out and ski all day and I come in, I'm ravenous and I eat more," Dr. Dow said. "But that sort of compensation has not been seen in the animal tests with these compounds."

The compounds are hormone mimics that act on the beta-adrenergic system, which has three types of receptors in cells in the body.

Some previous similar compounds passed through animal trials with flying colours but failed in human clinical trials, Dr. Dow said. Dr. Dow expects the new compounds to perform better in human trials than their predecessors did.

If human clinical trials are successful, the compounds could be available within five to 10 years, Dr. Dow said.

But in an interview with San Francisco's KCBS radio station, Dr. Dow stressed it would not be a miracle pill.

"Our ultimate clinical goal as we envision it now would be to increase energy expenditure around 10 per cent and that would turn into approximately half a pound (230 grammes) a week weight loss if it were successful...so you aren't going to be losing 50 pounds (23 kilograms) over a short period of time," he said.

Meanwhile, consumers in the developed world are increasingly demanding fat-free foods but are starting to reject these if they don't help people lose weight, experts told a recent London conference.

Michael Lindley, founder of Linetech, a British consultancy on new products, said U.S. buyers were starting to show their disappointment at the tills.

"The percentage of cus-

tomers who report buying reduced-fat or low-fat products dropped almost 5 per cent in 1996 Nabisco's market-leading Snackwells brand sales fell by over 30 per cent in the first part of 1996," he told the conference, organised by IBC.

This was in part because fat-free does not mean low-calorie, he said — and people noticed when they stepped on the scales.

U.S. Department of Agriculture statistics show that the percentage of Americans who are overweight had risen from 22 to 30 per cent, with average weight up five kilograms.

Products that wanted to make it in the marketplace would have to be tasty, low fat and low-calorie, Mr. Lindley said. "In a sense,

Ben Jerry's to introduce new fat-free products," he said.

Planter's has introduced a new reduced-fat peanut. There are also dozens of low-fat peanut butters, hot dogs, cheeses, cookies and salad dressings now on the market.

He concluded: "The implications for food marketers are clear — dietary patterns are changing, consumers around the world are increasingly saying they care about nutrition and they want the food industry to respond to their concerns."

Europe was still a growing market, Mr. Lindley said.

"The many different fat-reduced snack products in the market today are a powerful testament to consumer demand in Europe for fat-reduced foods," he said.

That could be good news for olestra. Procter & Gamble's chemically synthesised fat-replacement product, which has not yet been approved for use in Europe.

"It would not be surprising to see olestra-containing products appearing on supermarket shelves very soon after regulatory approval here," he said.

He said Procter & Gamble had reformulated olestra so it was now partly solid at body temperature — getting around the highly publicised problem of anal leakage.

Raisio's Benecol, a cholesterol-lowering margarine made from pine sterols, was another possible hit. Now available only in Finland, licenses are being sought for Sweden, elsewhere in Europe and the United States.

Dutch study shows how pill may cause blood clots

By Maggie Fox
Reuters

LONDON — A new study showing how the birth control pill may cause blood clots hit drug-company shares and renewed debate on just how dangerous the pills are.

Jan Rosing and colleagues at Maastricht University in the Netherlands said they had shown contraceptive pills interfered with the body's chemical mechanism for preventing dangerous blood clots.

Tests on blood plasma showed women who took birth control pills had a "significantly decreased sensitivity" to Activated Protein C (APC), a vital anticoagulant in the blood.

Women who took the third-generation contraceptive pills, which have been controversially linked to an increased risk of blood clots, were significantly less sensitive to APC than women on older pills, they reported in the British Journal of Haematology.

The report prompted a reply by another group of Dutch researchers in the Lancet medical journal.

"These results fit admirably with the epidemiological data," Jan Vandenbroucke and Frits Rosendaal of Leiden University Hospital wrote.

"For over a year the epidemiological findings pointing to an increased risk with some third-generation oral contraceptives have been either ignored or downplayed or have been denied," they added, describing Dr. Rosing's report as a "rare biological explanation emerging in the midst of controversy."

In 1995 the British government sparked a major scare when it announced that new, "third-generation" pills increased the risk of a blood clot in the leg — Deep-Vein Thrombosis (DVT).

Sales of the pills, formulated with the hormone progestagen in an attempt to make them even safer than

earlier pills, plummeted — as did the stocks of companies that make them.

Dutch firm Akzo Nobel NV's pharmaceutical unit Organon, which makes the third-generation pills Marvelon and Mercilon, lost 70 million guilders (\$36 million) in revenues in 1996. Schering and U.K.-based Wyeth, a unit of American Home Products Corp., were also hit.

The British government advice — which critics said had been issued without thought — was prompted by a study that showed the new pills doubled the risk of blood clots.

Epidemiologist Neil Poulter of University College London says this is true, but the risks are very tiny to begin with.

"I think the key thing is perspective," said Dr. Poulter, who has done a number of the studies on pill safety. "These risks are still small. They are still less than you would see in pregnancy."

Nonetheless Dr. Poulter said he was intrigued by Dr. Rosing's findings. "If there is a mechanism, then it supports the epidemiological evidence. But the low-dose pills of any type are very, very safe products."

In January a study funded by Schering and Akzo and published in the Lancet said the statistical link with blood clots was probably flawed. On Friday Organon said Dr. Rosing's study may also have been based on faulty methods.

Rosing's group compared the blood of women on various versions of the pill with that of women not on the pill and men. They found APC resistance in pill-users similar to that caused by a hereditary resistance.

They said this genetic resistance was common in Europe — about four per cent of the population has it — and said the genetic resistance could combine with the pill's effects to cause higher rates of DVT.

'Fresh brewed coffee may fight cancer'

SAN FRANCISCO (R) — A freshly-brewed cup of coffee may do more than just wake you up in the morning — its smell might be helping your body fight cancer and heart disease, a California researcher said Monday.

High-temperature coffee brewing produces protective chemicals called antioxidants that can be beneficial to health, according to Takayuki Shibamoto, a professor of Environmental Toxicology at the University of California at Davis, near Sacramento.

"It's comparable to a potent antioxidant like Vitamin E or Vitamin C, and down the line, we may find that the flavour or aroma of coffee may have some beneficial health effects," Prof. Shibamoto said.

Oxidants are oxygen-containing molecules called free radicals. Many scientists believe they can damage DNA and the membrane of cells in ways that lead to cancer.

Antioxidants can reduce free-radical levels, and have been shown in recent studies to have cancer and age-

fighting effects as well as to work against heart disease, Prof. Shibamoto said.

Prof. Shibamoto said these "healthful" antioxidants can be found in both regular and decaffeinated coffees. The antioxidant level in the aroma of one cup of coffee would be equivalent to three oranges, his tests showed.

To benefit from these chemicals, the coffee must be both smelled and consumed during the first 10 minutes after brewing and pouring, Prof. Shibamoto said.

"If you leave the coffee sitting for too long, the chemicals will be lost," he said.

Prof. Shibamoto cautioned coffee drinkers against increasing their consumption of coffee based on the results of his study, saying further research was needed.

Prof. Shibamoto's findings, presented at the American Chemical Society Conference in San Francisco, were based on test-tube studies of coffee's compounds. He said the next step would be tests on animals.

2 drinks every day is best for heart — study

By Maggie Fox
Reuters

LONDON — People who drink two measures of alcohol a day, five days a week, have the lowest risk of heart attacks, Australian researchers reported Friday.

They said their study proved that, to have health benefits, alcohol must be drunk regularly and in moderate amounts.

Patrick McElduff and Annette Dobson of the University of Newcastle in New South Wales took notice of a growing body of studies that show light to moderate drinkers have a lower risk of death from heart disease than heavy drinkers or non-

drinkers.

But, they complained, the studies did not differentiate between people who had just a few drinks every day and those who had all their drinks in a weekend binge.

They wanted to know whether it made any difference if the 14 or so drinks a week for women and 21 drinks a week recommended for men were spread out over a week.

Mr. McElduff and Ms. Dobson studied more than 11,500 heart attack sufferers and 6,000 people who did not have heart attacks and found the risk of heart attack was lowest among people who drank two mea-

Having a couple of drinks had a strong protective effect against heart attack in women for 24 hours, but not so strong an effect in men.

This could be because alcohol affects the fibrinolytic system, part of the process involved in blood clotting, they said. The effects only last 24 hours.

Mr. McElduff said they also had taken account of the possibility that non-drinkers in some of the studies did not drink because they had health problems.

Nonetheless, they said drinking alcohol should not be promoted as a health measure because of the bad effects of too much drinking.

WEEKEND CROSSWORD

SEASONAL
By Vivian O. Collins

ACROSS

1. Common rule
6. Up (heats)
10. "Don't" — on mat
13. Send out
14. "Clean" — (old TV show)
15. Mild sea
16. Wind indicator
17. Location of spring
18. Beauty from Peter
19. "Don't" — on mat
20. "Don't" — on mat
21. "Don't" — on mat
22. "Don't" — on mat
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Antisense therapy offers cancer hope, report says

By Maggie Fox
Reuters

LONDON — A pioneering treatment for cancer known as antisense therapy has worked surprisingly well in early trials and could offer a whole new way to fight cancer, doctors said Friday.

Four out of nine patients with non-hodgkin lymphoma, an incurable cancer, got better after treatment and in one the tumour disappeared and has stayed gone for six months, Dr. Andrew Webb of Britain's Royal Marsden Hospital and colleagues said.

"The results are far better than we anticipated at such an early stage of the drug's development," said David Cunningham, principal clinical researcher on the trial.

"The treatment also seems to be largely devoid of the type of side-effects often associated with traditional therapies. It's the first time this approach has been shown to work in humans and the results hold out genuine hope for patients with lymphoma."

Dr. Cunningham's group used synthesised short pieces of DNA — the material that makes up genes — and designed them to stick to messenger RNA (ribonucleic acid).

Messenger RNA carries the codes that tell cells which proteins to make. They are called "sense"

strands while synthetic DNA pieces designed to bind to them, and thus stop them from working, are called "antisense strands."

The team targeted a protein known as BCL-2 which is over-produced in non-hodgkin lymphoma and interferes with apoptosis, the process of programmed cell suicide that normally prevents cancer. Failure of apoptosis allows damaged cells to replicate out of control into tumours.

The antisense molecule — manufactured as anti-code G3139 by U.S. drug company Genta Inc — was designed to bind to messenger RNA carrying instructions for BCL-2.

They gave it to nine patients with non-hodgkin lymphoma over two weeks.

"No treatment-related toxic effects occurred, apart from local inflammation at the infusion site," they wrote in their report in the Lancet medical journal.

"In two patients, Computed Tomography (CT) scans showed a reduction in tumour size (one minor, one complete response)." Two more patients had fewer cancer cells circulating during treatment.

Eight of the patients in the trial were given drugs afterwards and responded very well to the chemotherapy.

They said perhaps the most important use of antisense therapy in this case would be to over-

ANSWERS
BANK OF KNOWLEDGE

1. Approximately one litre (1/4 gallon).
2. Coral.
3. Jupiter.
4. The tears of grief.
5. Tuscany, Italy.
6. Yes.

PUZZLES

(A) WORD CHANGES

WOOL
TOOL
TOLL
TALL
TALK
TACK
SACK
SOCK

(B) FLOWER POWER

367

Legoland — an adventure that 'inexorably brings out the child in everyone'

By Ica Wahbeh
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

BILLUND, Denmark — In the early 1930s, the local carpenter, Ole Kirk Christiansen went broke. The depression, which began with the Wall Street crash in 1929, with its impact on the whole industrialised world, affected Denmark's main activity at the time: agriculture.

Billund farmers, the carpenter's customers, greatly reduced their demand for his services and that almost pushed him to the brink of bankruptcy.

Christiansen did not give up, though. He believed that although people could not afford to build houses, they would still buy their children toys. In 1932, he and a few employees began producing wooden toys, by hand, in his small workshop. Times were tough, but his perseverance and ambition made him successful.

In 1934, Christiansen had to come up with a name for his toys and the workshop. A competition was set up and he was the winner. Taking the first two letters from the Danish words "leg" (god) (which mean "play

well"), he came up with the word LEGO. A fortuitous choice since it is easy to pronounce in all languages, and it was later discovered, in Latin it meant "I put together" and "I read".

Godtfred Kirk Christiansen, the workshop founder's son, became full-time employee of the establishment in 1934, after his 14th birthday. The company was at the time manufacturing a wide variety of products: vehicles, animals, Yo-Yos and other wooden toys. In the 1940s, there were around 150 items produced by the LEGO company; by the 50s, the number of employees had risen to 65 and the workshop became a small factory.

During World War II, when the country was occupied and a ban was imposed on the import of toys, Christiansen, the father, was able to sell throughout Denmark and thus buy machinery and plastic moulds. It is then that the foundations of the company that would enjoy worldwide success were laid.

With the discovery of plastic, the carpenter saw a great potential. Starting in

1947, LEGO began manufacturing a range of plastic rattles, small dolls, animals and building bricks, along with its line of wooden toys.

In 1949, a rather primitive forerunner to the LEGO brick was launched. The building elements, with either four or eight studs, were first sold in Denmark under the name "Automatic binding bricks". The name changed later to "LEGO bricks" and they could only be stacked one on top of the other.

Five years later, Godtfred Christiansen developed the "LEGO system of play", the construction system consisting of a variety of building elements with which everyone is familiar today. The products were marketed in boxed sets which, apart from the LEGO bricks, included small moulded vehicles and figures, as well as a town map made from cardboard, opening up the possibility of different kinds of play. Sold at first only in Denmark, these new toys left quite a few toy retailers sceptical about their prospects; time proved the Christiansens right again.

The "great" discovery of

Godtfred Christiansen in 1957 — the tubes placed inside the hollow LEGO bricks which increased their clutching strength and made the models more stable and their combination possibilities virtually infinite — was patented internationally a year later.

In 1960, a fire destroyed the LEGO company's wooden toy warehouse. It led the management to the decision to discontinue the production of wooden toys and thus, resources were directed towards further development, production and marketing of the LEGO system of play. The quality of the bricks increased in 1963, when ABS plastics replace cellulose acetate as the main raw material.

In 1966, LEGO products sold in more than 60,000 retail outlets in about 130 countries. The LEGO Group is among the top ten toy manufacturers, the only European company on the list.

Now 542 sets, put together from 1,964 elements, form the range of the six product lines which, as a rule, make elements compatible with each other, including with the elements

manufactured in the 1950s.

"The founding family does not want the buyers to feel cheated," by producing every year new elements that would mean discarding the old ones, said Corporate Senior Manager, Information and Public Relations Peter Ambeck-Madsen.

"And if the grandparents stowed their old sets away, you can easily take them out of the attic and use them to build in combination with the new elements," added Mr. Ambeck-Madsen, mentioning that the business is still very much a family affair that helps avoid potential bureaucracy and hassling, time-consuming board decisions.

Although there are no shareholders to hold it accountable, the company has its customers and its standards to answer to. "We don't have to be the biggest but we must remain the best," said Godtfred Kirk Christiansen on one occasion. And, judging from statistics provided by the LEGO Group, close to 300 million children and adults all over the world play or have played with LEGO bricks, and every year, children spend almost 5 billion hours playing with them.

Since the idea of renewal is essential for the group, new ideas, themes, sets and elements are the target, which enables children to have new ways to play, think and learn.

With the accent set on developing the child's creativity and enhancing his/her learning abilities, the LEGO producers consider that their products are not ready-made toys, but components for putting together and taking apart. This gives children immense freedom to combine, alter, build, dismantle and — play.

The needs and development of children are taken into account, and the LEGO elements could be used by 6-month-olds as easily as by teenagers and adults, if they choose to try their skills at it. And to keep pace with the space age and



maintain the interest of the computer-wise children of today, the company has come up with a LEGO Technic set that includes a CD-ROM with building instructions and extra material and, in 1996, it went on the Internet.

By the end of 1996, the LEGO Group was employing more than 9,000 people in 50 companies in 29 countries.

The rags-to-riches story of the Kirk Christiansen family would not be complete without mentioning the Legoland park in Billund.

Opened in 1968, the park quickly became Denmark's most popular tourist attraction outside Copenhagen. In 1996, for example, it received close to 1.3 million visitors.

The family park, established on 110,000 square metres, contains miniature theme models of buildings, landscapes, figures from several countries.

"We believe it is good for people to recognise and identify with the things they see," said Mr. Ambeck-Madsen. Thus, a Swedish canal, complete with a cruising ship, a draw bridge and a sluice system, would be as easily recognised by a Swede as the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church in Berlin would be by a German, the Brighton Pier by a Briton or the Mount Rushmore Monu-

ment by an American, at least.

About 44.5 million bricks have gone into building the various models at Legoland, which include the Amalienborg Royal Palace, of Copenhagen, the Franz Josef Strauss Airport, of Munich, St. Paul's Cathedral, of London, and the much sought after Pirateland, a sure point of attraction, among others.

Bonsai trees on perfectly manicured lawns bring colour to gravel-paved lanes and miniature hedge borders. Colourful facades draw the eye and various sounds give more life to the mechanised models and are one more delight to the senses.

Amsterdam, the Netherlands; Bergen, Norway; Leuven Town Hall, Belgium, provide but a few enchanting sites; delightful animals — an elephant, giraffes, ostriches, one with the head in the sand — make up a convincing savannah scene, as does the

beckoning girl by a saloon door or the serenading trio clad in tattered clothes and looking as boorish and jovial as the pirates in Pirateland, where a trip inexorably brings out the child in everyone.

The visit to the enchanting park could be rounded up with a stop at the medieval castle (built of concrete this time, with a trompe l'oeil facade of bricks), complete with moat and bridges leading to doors with torches aflame on the flanks welcoming visitors. Inside, the wooden tables and benches are replicas of the medieval inns and the waiting people wear the costumes of the age. The titillating aromas of the wholesome meals only complete the adventure.

Outside Denmark, the first Legoland was opened in Windsor, Great Britain, in 1966, and a park is projected to open in Carlsbad, California, in 1999.

LEGO "bits and pieces"

4,9152 cm3 is the volume of an 8-stud LEGO brick. The tolerance of accuracy at the LEGO mould factories is 5 thousandths of a millimetre. Six 8-stud bricks of the same colour can be combined in 102,981,500 ways. Up until 1996, about 180 billion LEGO elements were moulded. During 1996, quality inspectors in Billund spot-checked 2,210,000 elements for moulding faults.



Playing among wind mills (above) or facing a scary pirate (above right) is part of a trip to Legoland park

Fujimori celebrates victory

(Continued from page 1)

radio communication which the rebels maintained with their comrades in Lima.

Exhausted but happy, the mainly middle-aged, male captives were reunited with families and friends and began recounting their 126-day ordeal with its dramatic finale.

Bolivia's ambassador to Peru, Jorge Gumucio, said 10 of the rebels were playing soccer in a large reception room when the troops stormed in. "They had turned the room into an indoor football pitch (field) under which were the tunnels full of explosives," he told Bolivian Television.

"The operation began with explosions under the floor where they were playing and immediately afterwards in other tunnels through which the special troops entered."

He revealed that some of the Peruvian military officers who were captives knew about the rescue plan beforehand. "They warned us 10 minutes beforehand so we could not really prepare. We waited for them to come in and it was surgical, though with some cost especially for the special forces."

Mr. Fujimori said extreme circumstances had prompted him to use force and confirmed that "certain signals" were given to

hostages beforehand. He did not elaborate.

The president rode through the streets of Lima in a triumphant mood, waving a flag and shouting to crowds. One-by-one he shook hands with the soldiers who carried out the raid.

But he fought back tears as he announced the death of Judge Giusti and two commandos. One of them had been his son Kenji's bodyguard. "There was no other way out," said Mr. Fujimori, who termed the operation was "a relative success" instead of a complete victory because of the deaths.

The Peruvian leader had staked his political career on the decision

to send in the troops at 3:23 p.m. local time after four months of fruitless negotiations with the MRTA during the longest hostage siege in Latin American history.

The soldiers, who had been preparing for months and reportedly received training from U.S. and British security experts, began bringing out hostages within minutes.

The rebels originally took 500 hostages but released most in the early days of the crisis, keeping those they considered most valuable to obtain the release of jailed comrades.

Mr. Fujimori, 58, in the seventh year of a turbulent period in office, said he did not

warn Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto beforehand because he could not afford to lose time. "The surprise factor was fundamental," he said.

The freed hostages included an array of government ministers and security force officials, two dozen Japanese businessmen and diplomats and Mr. Fujimori's brother, Pedro.

MRTA spokesman Isaac Velazco told Reuters from Hamburg by telephone that the guerrillas would retaliate for the assault by attacking military and economic targets in Peru. Armed forces and police officials said security had been tightened throughout Lima and the rest of Peru.

Hamas urges PNA to release prisoners

(Continued from page 1)

Mr. Zahar was referring to the 1987-1993 uprising in the West Bank including Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip. Under strong Israeli pressure, Palestinian police arrested hundreds of Hamas and Islamic Jihad members last year after the groups carried out four suicide bombings in Israel in February and March, killing 58 people plus the bombers.

But most of those detained were subsequently released and Mr. Arafat has resisted demands from Israel and the United States for a similar crackdown against the groups now.

Israel has insisted that it will not resume the peace process with the Palestinians until Mr. Arafat destroys armed anti-Israeli groups.

Moves escalate to reverse decision

(Continued from page 1)

not deserve to be prime minister."

The mass circulation daily Yediot Aharonot called on the prime minister "to leave his bunker and clean house," supporting demands by some ministers for a cabinet shake-up that would include taking the justice portfolio away from Mr. Hanegbi.

Thousands of ultra-orthodox Jews in black hats and suits rallied Wednesday in support of Mr. Deri, the only politician expected to be charged in a high-level influence-trading scandal.

"If he was guilty, all the others would have been guilty," said Yehuda Cohen, a 16-year-old seminary student. "This is discrimination against a religious man."

The decision to charge only the Moroccan-born Deri threatens to widen the rift between Israel's Sephardic Jews — those of Middle

Eastern and North African descent — and Ashkenazi Jews of European descent who have traditionally held most positions of power.

An estimated 10,000 supporters of Shas, which draws its support from Sephardic Jews, rallied in sweltering heat at a Jerusalem sports stadium Wednesday to show their support for Mr. Deri and to declare the decision to indict him racist.

"Our hearts have been broken," Rabbi David Yosef, son of Shas spiritual leader Ovadia Yosef, told the crowd. "Anti-religious elements are trying to destroy the Sephardic Jews."

Shas holds a crucial 10 seats in Mr. Netanyahu's governing coalition which has 66 of 120 seats in the Knesset, Israel's parliament.

Mr. Deri, who received a standing ovation when he appeared Wednesday, said he is being persecuted because of the party's growing power.

Egypt loses interest in gas pipeline to Israel

CAIRO (R) — Egypt said Tuesday it had little interest in plans to build a natural gas pipeline to Israel because the quantities were small and the Israelis did not yet have their house in order.

Oil Minister Hamdi Al Banbi told a news conference that talks on the pipeline had made little progress for almost one year and that nothing would happen until the Israelis took a decision on their energy priorities.

The pipeline, known as the "peace pipeline" because of the political symbolism, has been under discussion for years but Egypt has since shifted its attention to the more attractive option of exporting liquefied natural gas to Turkey.

"The peace pipeline, of which the capacity will be about two to 2.5 billion cubic metres a year is a very small project that is not attracting our real attention," Mr. Banbi said.

"We are not giving this big priority because the consumption of gas in Egypt is expanding and we are talking about the export of 10 billion cubic metres to Turkey," he added.

"In my opinion nothing will happen until the topic of the development of Israeli power stations gets back to the priority level that can make the decision-makers in

Israel make a decision. They are concentrating on other topics, so this stands as it was almost one year ago," he said.

Israel's infrastructure ministry said last month it would issue an international tender to build and operate an overland pipeline to supply about 30 per cent of Israel's gas market.

The concession would be an adjunct to a proposed undersea pipeline between Egypt and Israel to supply gas to Israel Electric Corp, which is expected to consume 70 per cent of future Israeli demand for natural gas, ministry officials said.

But Mr. Banbi said Egypt had heard of the undersea pipeline proposal only through the press. "We have not talked about it (the undersea pipeline) with Israel and there is no contact on this topic at the present time," he added.

Israeli oil industry sources say talks on sales of Egyptian gas to Israel will in future be between Israel Electric and AMOCO and AGIP, the foreign oil companies which are developing the gas fields off the Nile Delta.

They say the idea is to bypass negotiations between the Egyptian and Israeli governments.

Industry sources in Egypt say it would be impossible to keep the Egyptian govern-

ment out of the talks and Mr. Banbi blamed the delays on confusion on the Israeli side.

"During the negotiations in the past there were too many people talking from the Israeli side so it was not feasible to reach any conclusions," he said.

"An agreement is expected soon on the construction of a liquefied natural gas (LNG) plant in Egypt to supply Turkey with up to 10 billion cubic metres of gas a year," the Egyptian oil minister said. With its proven natural gas reserves of 990 billion cubic metres steadily enriched by new finds, the LNG project is set to launch Egypt as a major regional gas exporter.

Mr. Banbi told the news conference that Egypt also was looking to tap what he called the "good gas market" in southern Europe. He named Spain and Italy as potential customers.

Egypt and Turkey signed a memorandum of understanding last November for the LNG plant project, which will cost between \$2 billion and \$4 billion and is expected to come on stream in 2001.

It will have an initial annual capacity of five billion cubic metres.

The minister said a site west of Port Said on the Mediterranean has been chosen for the new plant, but that

the start of the project hinged on agreement between Turkey and Egypt on the price of the gas.

"The LNG project is still under study," he said. "Further technical meetings have been held between the two sides."

Asked when an agreement was expected, he said: "I cannot give a specific date, but it could be very soon."

Mr. Banbi, who came to office in 1991, told the Cyprus-based newsletter Middle East Economic Survey last month that an agreement was likely before the end of the year "or even maybe before mid-1997."

Turning to other projects, Mr. Banbi told the news conference that Egypt and neighboring Libya are nearing agreement on the route of an oil pipeline to transfer 150,000 barrels of crude a day from Libya to a refinery in Egypt's Mediterranean port city of Alexandria.

A feasibility study of the proposed pipeline will follow, he said. He did not specify where in Libya the crude would come from or give a target date for construction.

The pipeline, Mr. Banbi said, was of strategic importance to Egypt, where the population of 63 million is growing by one million a year and the economy is expanding at about five per cent a year.

REUTERS

REUTERS

The Business of Information

Major Currencies & Cross Rates									
	USD	GBP	JPY	CHF	DEM	FRF	ITL	ESP	GRD
US Dollar	1.0000	0.6936	106.48	0.6558	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
DE Mark	0.6936	1.0000	153.36	0.8636	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
GB Sterling	1.4563	1.0000	166.09	0.7564	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
CH Franc	0.6558	0.8636	1.0000	1.0000	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
JP Yen	0.0094	0.0065	1.0000	0.0074	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
CA Dollar	0.7182	0.5078	79.37	0.6037	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
IT Lira	0.0006	0.0006	0.0006	0.0006	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
NL Guilder	0.3760	0.2636	3.7603	0.3536	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
FR Franc	0.1732	0.1246	1.7320	0.1463	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48

Middle Eastern Currencies									
	USD	GBP	JPY	CHF	DEM	FRF	ITL	ESP	GRD
US Dollar	1.0000	0.6936	106.48	0.6558	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
Jordan Dinar	1.4124	0.9832	141.24	0.9432	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
GB Sterling	0.2667	1.0000	166.09	0.7564	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
Bahrain Dinar	2.4667	1.7222	246.67	1.6667	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
Qatar Dinar	0.2747	0.1945	27.47	0.2299	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
Kuwait Dinar	3.3333	2.3333	333.33	2.2222	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
Emirate Dinar	0.2724	0.1929	27.24	0.2222	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
Lebanese P1000	0.0006	0.0006	0.0006	0.0006	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
Egyptian	0.2380	0.1708	23.80	0.1708	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48

Energy									
	USD	GBP	JPY	CHF	DEM	FRF	ITL	ESP	GRD
Brent	17.95	12.50	1795	12.50	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
WTI	18.50	13.00	1850	13.00	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
Bony	17.95	12.50	1795	12.50	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
Dubai	16.50	11.50	1650	11.50	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
UL Gas	168.00	120.00	16800	120.00	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48

Mid-East Currencies									
	USD	GBP	JPY	CHF	DEM	FRF	ITL	ESP	GRD
SA Riyal	0.2067	0.1463	20.67	0.1463	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
AE Dirham	0.2722	0.1929	27.22	0.1929	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
KW Dinar	3.3333	2.3333	333.33	2.2222	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
QD Dinar	0.2724	0.1929	27.24	0.2222	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
YD Dinar	0.2724	0.1929	27.24	0.2222	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
YD Dinar	0.2724	0.1929	27.24	0.2222	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
YD Dinar	0.2724	0.1929	27.24	0.2222	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
YD Dinar	0.2724	0.1929	27.24	0.2222	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48

Metal Prices									
	USD	GBP	JPY	CHF	DEM	FRF	ITL	ESP	GRD
Gold (oz's)	340.7	241.2	34070	241.2	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
Silver (oz's)	4.73	3.47	4730	3.47	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
Platinum (oz's)	374.7	275.7	37470	275.7	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
AL (3 Months)	1908	1407	19080	1407	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
CU (3 Months)	2380	1734	23800	1734	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
Zinc (3 Months)	1283	938	12830	938	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
Lead (3 Months)	636	460	6360	460	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
Ni (3 Months)	7460	5440	74600	5440	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48

Currency Deposit Rates (Bid)									
	USD	GBP	JPY	CHF	DEM	FRF	ITL	ESP	GRD
USD	5.58	4.08	558	4.08	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
GBP	6.90	5.00	690	5.00	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
JPY	0.44	0.32	44	0.32	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
DEM	3.11	2.24	311	2.24	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
FRF	3.27	2.37	327	2.37	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
CHF	1.68	1.22	168	1.22	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
ITL	6.53	4.79	653	4.79	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
ESP	6.70	4.90	670	4.90	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
GRD	6.70	4.90	670	4.90	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48

Main Equity Indices									
	USD	GBP	JPY	CHF	DEM	FRF	ITL	ESP	GRD
New York	6808.31	4988.21	680831	4988.21	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
London	373.42	275.7	37342	275.7	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
Tokyo	18735.47	13735.47	1873547	13735.47	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
Paris	18735.47	13735.47	1873547	13735.47	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
Frankfurt	3386.95	2486.95	338695	2486.95	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48

Energy									
	USD	GBP	JPY	CHF	DEM	FRF	ITL	ESP	GRD
Coffee (c/lbs)	210.67	153.00	21067	153.00	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
Cocoa (\$/ton)	1488	1088	14880	1088	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
Sugar (\$/ton)	314.5	228.0	31450	228.0	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
Wheat (\$/ton)	174	126	1740	126	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
Soya (c/lbs)	23.91	17.50	2391	17.50	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
Tea (\$/kg)	142	103	1420	103	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
Barley (\$/bsh)	0	0	0	0	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
Rice (\$/ton)	480	352	4800	352	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48

Commodity									
	USD	GBP	JPY	CHF	DEM	FRF	ITL	ESP	GRD
Coffee (c/lbs)	210.67	153.00	21067	153.00	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
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Barley (\$/bsh)	0	0	0	0	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48
Rice (\$/ton)	480	352	4800	352	1.3663	6.5596	1636.26	166.37	200.48

39	Farrier	4	Explosive letters
40	Metaphysical poet	5	Fortune-telling card
41	City's business center	6	Elevator man
43	Panther	7	Departs
44	Boat propeller	8	Spectator
45	Dull finish	9	Instructive example
46	Poam of boyhood memories	10	Bard's river
51	Fleur-de—	11	Nautlius' skipper
54	Understands	12	Was aware
55	Blaspheme	14	Yeltsin
56	Type measure	20	Snubs
57	Contributed	21	Flintstone
58	Earthy pigment	23	Depend
59	Soon	25	Pulverize
60	Speaker of	26	Cowboy show
		27	Burdened

Daily Beat

A review of news from the Arabic press

Years of service likely to be top factor in downsizing government

**** MOST SUGGESTIONS** concerning the administrative development process and the elimination of over-staffing at ministries and government departments are currently focusing on the period of employment of civil servants. According to informed sources, the focus on the years of service is now being considered in principle before moving to consider performance, transfers and appointments of "the right persons in the right job."

The sources said that every government entity will be studied separately without talking the same measures on all government institutions as each one of them has its special situation either in the type of work performed or the number of staff employed. Consideration will be given to each case including the method of hiring as during the past years haphazard and uncontrolled appointments were made, especially within the "category four" of civil service classification. Such appointments were based on favouritism and unfair practices to gain public support and to prepare for the coming parliamentary elections.

Among the proposals submitted by various ministries was one recommending the retirement of personnel in the "special category" classification who have served the government for more than 30 years. The sources estimate the number of those at between 5,000 and 10,000 employees most of whom are now working at the ministries of education and health. It is estimated that there are 2,000 civil servants who have exceeded 30 years of service still working at the Ministry of Education alone.

Within the process of downsizing, the government is also currently computing the numbers of those civil servants who do not possess scientific qualifications or who only hold diploma degrees in order to put them for retirement after a service of 25 years or more.

In another development, a study conducted by the Ministry of Education has concluded that no less than 50 per cent of the administrative staff were surplus workforce and that they should be moved from their administration posts to the field works at various schools. According to sources at the Ministry of Education, the number of the excess staff would run into thousands and cannot be absorbed at schools where there is also a surplus of teachers especially in the administration specialisation.

The sources explained that what should be done now is to "put the right teacher in the right post" and to eliminate all aspects of favouritism which prevailed in the past. "It is no longer acceptable to have a librarian with a specialisation in English language and an assistant principal with a specialisation in chemistry or physics or even a laboratory technician holding a degree in history or geography," one source emphasised (Al-Dustour).

Investors race for world's biggest Islamic bank

ABU DHABI (AFP) — The United Arab Emirates (UAE) investors are racing to subscribe in the world's biggest Islamic bank that is to be set up by the oil-rich Gulf states, dealers said Wednesday.

Many of them have sold shares in other institutions to secure cash for their stake in the Emirates Islamic Bank (EIB), which will be based in Abu Dhabi and partly owned by the UAE government, they said.

"I have been flooded with queries about the date of the subscription, which I expect to begin within a few weeks," said Bassam Al Ramahi, deputy manager of the Emirates Commercial Centre, a leading broker-

age house.

"Many dealers are selling their shares to get cash to contribute to the bank. I am sure that the bank's capital will be far oversubscribed because the government participation gives confidence to investors," he told AFP.

Bankers said the central bank had already approved the project and it would be launched once its statute is finalised. The state-owned Abu Dhabi Investment Authority and other official institutions are among the key shareholders.

The project had initially been called the Abu Dhabi Islamic Bank and was confined to investors from the emirate. But it

was changed to cover the whole UAE following applications by other emirates to set up similar banks.

The official daily Al-Bayan said the bank would have a paid-up capital of 1.2 billion dirhams (\$326 million) and an authorised capital of three billion dirhams (\$817 million).

"Our expectations are that subscription would reach double the authorised capital in a short period of time given the large liquidity in the market. This could prompt shareholders to raise the paid-up capital," Mr. Ramahi said.

The venture will be the biggest Islamic bank in the world in terms of capital. The Cairo-based

Faisal Bank is currently the top Islamic bank.

EIB is the second Islamic bank in the UAE after the Dubai Islamic Bank, at present the second biggest in the world, with a capital of \$135.6 million.

Al-Bayan did not specify the size of the government's shareholding in EIB but bankers expect it to be less than 50 per cent. They said investors from other Arab Gulf states would be given a limited access to the project.

"This project is highly feasible and I am certain there will be a rush by investors," said Zuhair Kaswani, another UAE stockbroker.

"The UAE has a large number of banks but the

market here and in other regional states can accommodate more given the expanding business opportunities. As you see, most banks are making high profits every year.

The UAE, a major OPEC oil-producer, has 19 national banks and 28 foreign units, with assets of around \$46 billion. It has suspended permits for new foreign commercial banks but allowed opening of representative offices.

EIB was planned after several other Middle East banks opened Islamic banking units to take advantage of the growing demand for such operations.

"There are two main factors for the expected

success of the EIB project. The first is that there is a growing tendency by the public to invest in Islamic banks for religious reasons," Mr. Ramahi said.

"The second factor is purely economic. Most Islamic banks here are now ensuring higher returns for investors compared with commercial banks," he added.

Islamic banks do not deal in interest which is prohibited in Islam as usury. Their main activities cover financing of projects and charging a percentage of the profits as well as trading in property, cars and other items.

Israeli tourists flock to Jordan, Egypt despite cold relations

TEL AVIV (AFP) — The number of Israelis visiting Egypt reached a new peak this month despite tense relations between the countries over a freeze in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, said a report published Monday.

The number of Israelis visiting Jordan during the weekend before the Jewish Passover was about the same as the equivalent weekend last year, the Haaretz newspaper reported.

The flow of Israelis searching sun in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula and history at the Petra ruins in Jordan continued despite harsh criticism of Israel by the Arab countries' rulers over the teetering peace process.

The negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians were effectively halted after Israel on March 18 began construction on a Jewish settlement in Arab East Jerusalem.

In response to the start of construction on the settlement, the Arab League called on its 22 members to impose sanctions against Israel.

Egypt and Jordan are the only two Arab countries to have signed peace agreements with the Jewish state, in 1979 and 1994 respectively.

Yet despite a drastic drop in Egyptians and Jordanians travelling to the Holy Land, Israelis continue to see their Arab neighbours as amiable hosts.

In the weekend before Passover, which began at sundown Monday, some 7,500 Israelis crossed the Taba checkpoint into Egypt — the largest number ever to have travelled through the crossing in one weekend, tourism officials told Haaretz.

During the same period, some 5,000 Israelis crossed by land into Jordan.

Travel continued at a fairly constant rate despite the massacre of seven Israeli schoolgirls last month by a rogue Jordanian soldier at a popular tourist site along the border of the two countries.

The number of Israelis travelling by land to the two Arab countries rose 5.25 per cent in 1996 compared to 1995.

Iran plans to become major gas exporter

KISH ISLAND, Iran (R) — Iran aims to export an annual 4.5 billion cubic metres of gas at the end of the decade and has plans to increase this tenfold by the year 2005, a senior Iranian gas official has said. In the year 2000, Iran would be export-

ing three billion cubic metres to Turkey, one billion to Armenia and 0.5 billion to Azerbaijan's Nakhichevan enclave, Reza Rostami Sani, director of international affairs at the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC), told reporters.

JORDAN FINANCIAL MARKET											
HOUSING BANK CENTER AMMAN - SERIANSI											
TELEPHONE: 607171 / 607179											
ORGANIZED MARKET SHARE PRICE LIST FOR WEDNESDAY 23/04/1997											
PAST 12 MONTHS HIGH	PAST 12 MONTHS LOW	COMPANY'S NAME	F / E	DIV.	NO. OF SHARES	NO. OF TRANS.	VALUE TRADED JD	OPEN PRICE	CLOSE PRICE	CHANGE	
269,000	213,000	ARAB BANK	11.7	1.57	8	520	132960	255.00	255.00	-	
2,100	1,790	JOR. NATIONAL BK.	8	0.00	10	9600	17371	1.80	1.82	0.02	
5,500	4,100	ALBANK AMMAN	9.3	3.33	1	3400	6300	4.40	4.52	0.12	
3,600	2,760	BANK OF JORDAN	10.5	0.00	3	163	469	2.92	2.90	-0.02	
1,210	880	KID-EAST INV. BK.	64.4	0.00	2	500	490	1.00	0.98	-0.02	
2,960	2,440	JOR. INVESTMENT BANK	19.2	0.00	5	135	1151	2.66	2.65	-0.01	
1,090	800	JOR. GULF BANK	4.9	6.54	3	7000	5740	0.82	0.82	-	
4,120	3,480	JOR. ISLAMIC BANK	18.3	0.00	11	657	2505	3.76	3.81	0.05	
1,220	960	ORION BK. SAV. INV.	9	0.00	2	1500	1540	1.42	1.40	-0.02	
1,640	1,000	ORION BK. SAV. INV.	9	0.00	2	3300	3630	1.12	1.10	-0.02	
BANK SECTOR TOTALS INDEX: 193.43 CHG: +0.03											
1,820	1,450	JOR. ELECTRIC PWR.	11.7	7.14	12	4480	7825	1.68	1.68	-	
5,050	4,100	ARAB INTL. HOTELS	17.2	2.56	6	2650	11348	4.27	4.34	0.07	
1,520	930	WATL. PORTFOLIO	9	0.00	9	1800	1810	1.02	1.00	-0.02	
1,050	820	REAL ESTATE INV.	12.5	6.67	2	850	498	0.90	0.90	-	
950	480	JORDAN TEL. CO.	28.7	0.00	3	2500	1247	4.9	4.80	-0.10	
3,720	2,990	ARAB INTL. INV. EDUC.	12.1	6.54	2	750	3295	3.08	3.06	-0.02	
1,220	960	SARAKA EDUCATION	9	0.00	4	1150	1116	0.97	0.97	-	
2,230	1,650	UNIFIED CO.	8.0	6.51	2	2000	3380	1.69	1.69	-	
SERVICE SECTOR TOTALS INDEX: 103.26 CHG: +0.34											
3,800	3,060	JOR. CEMENT FACT.	21.6	2.65	19	7736	29070	3.78	3.77	-0.01	
3,600	2,710	JOR. PHOSPHATE MINES	34.4	0.00	2	400	1280	3.20	3.20	-	
10,400	8,720	JOR. PETROL REFINERY	10.3	7.84	11	1324	13510	10.20	10.20	-	
3,260	1,650	INDUSTRIAL COMM. MGR.	27.4	0.00	15	3887	8087	2.15	2.04	-0.11	
7,250	5,650	JOR. CERAMIC IND.	8.7	3.87	1	100	701	7.05	7.01	-0.04	
2,310	1,490	UNIV. CHEM. IND.	8.5	7.84	3	830	648	1.50	1.53	0.03	
5,400	3,120	ARAB ALUM. IND.	9.5	8.77	8	1125	3797	3.30	3.42	0.12	
960	450	LIVESTOCK & POULTRY	11.4	0.00	14	12200	6600	1.54	1.54	-	
1,370	1,040	ARAB BAK. CONF. IND.	10.8	0.00	8	2400	754	1.07	1.11	0.04	
820	540	NATIONAL IND.	8.9	10.00	7	10500	6300	0.60	0.60	-	
1,540	730	INTERMED. PETRO. CHEM.	9	0.00	13	5400	4119	0.77	0.76	-0.01	
3,090	2,180	WATL. CHEM. IND.	56.8	0.00	2	260	542	2.18	2.18	-	
3,730	2,130	WATL. CABLE WIRE MFG.	17.0	0.00	5	1125	3128	2.65	2.79	0.14	
1,170	570	JOR. SULPHUR CHEM.	9	0.00	28	20600	15994	0.76	0.77	0.01	
1,670	1,120	ARAB PHARM. CHEM.	26.4	0.00	2	500	705	1.42	1.41	-0.01	
2,660	1,420	UNIV. MED. IND.	4.5	13.51	18	4300	6312	1.44	1.48	0.04	
1,780	1,140	JOR. IND. RESOURCES	15.9	8.47	9	2000	2373	1.19	1.18	-0.01	
2,360	1,750	EL - BAY READY WEAR	9	0.00	2	282	499	1.77	1.77	-	
1,350	1,080	UNIV. TOBACCO	27.3	0.00	20	8546	10050	1.17	1.16	-0.01	
1,440	900	UNION CH. & VEG.	28.8	0.00	1	1200	1082	0.91	0.91	-	
INDUSTRIAL SECTOR TOTALS INDEX: 117.73 CHG: +0.01											
GRAND TOTAL INDEX: 152.83 CHG: +0.04											
PARALLEL MARKET SHARE PRICE LIST FOR WEDNESDAY 23/04/1997											
780	440	JOR. TRADE FAC.	12.0	0.00	11	13650	6148	45	45	-	
840	670	UNION INV. 50%	65.1	0.00	4	3150	597	0.68	0.68	-	
840	370	ARAB FIN. INVEST.	9	0.00	15	27332	14759	0.51	0.54	0.03	
950	740	AL-SHARQ INV. 75%	9	0.00	2	2880	1668	0.81	0.80	-0.01	
950	650	AL-SHARQ INV. 75%	14.7	0.00	9	4371	1746	0.68	0.68	-	
640	200	JOR. IND. MATCH-TEKCO	9	0.00	4	5350	1249	0.23	0.24	0.01	
740	510	UNIV. FOOD & MED.	9	0.00	4	1350	807	0.60	0.59	-0.01	
1,690	1,300	WATL. CHEM. IND.	8.5	7.84	3	830	703	1.40	1.40	-	
690	430	ARAB INTL. INV. IND.	9	0.00	7	6500	2925	0.45	0.45	-	
720	490	WATL. TEXTILE	9	0.00	10	16350	8542	0.51	0.51	-	
840	490	WATL. CHEM. IND. MACHCO	9	0.00	27	43400	30814	0.67	0.71	0.04	
660	430	WATL. DYES & MACHCO	9	0.00	4	4850	2904	0.57	0.60	0.03	
660	430	ARAB ELECT. IND.	9	0.00	1	100	52	0.52	0.51	-0.01	
730	490	KIDNEY PEARL 75%	9	0.00	5	4000	1440	0.61	0.61	-	
1,310	890	UNION TOBACCO 75%	9	0.00	4	583	367	0.90	0.88	-0.02	
770	550	RAFI PHARM. 65%	9	0.00	11	11950	3227	0.62	0.62	-	
640	390	IND. ENG.	27.7	0.00	11	18122	8199	0.44	0.45	0.01	
960	760	IND. CERAMIC	9	0.00	4	849	661	0.78	0.78	-	
590	360	J. TEXTILE MACH.	9	0.00	1	500	205	0.43	0.41	-0.02	
760	590	PERM. ENV. P. CONV.	9	0.00	7	46	46	0.61	0.60	-0.01	
820	590	WATL. POLYTRY	9	0.00	2	500	340	0.69	0.68	-0.01	
870	530	KID-EAST COMPLEX	9.1	0.00	55	1093900	853584	0.78	0.78	-	
GRAND TOTAL 202 1264736 947110											

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Chang wins 500th match

ORLANDO (R) — Michael Chang earned his 500th career victory when he defeated Jan-Michael Gambill in the first round of the \$289,250 U.S. men's clay court championships on Tuesday.

Chang, the top seed and ranked third in the world, ousted American newcomer Gambill 6-3, 6-3 to advance to the second round.

Chang's 500th win puts him fourth on the list of active win leaders, behind Boris Becker, Thomas Muster and Pete Sampras.

Fourth-seeded American,

Alex O'Brien, cruised to victory over Austria's Gilbert Schaller, 6-4, 6-2 also in first round action on Tuesday. Sixth seeded Chris Woodruff of the U.S. won his first round match, defeating Javier Frana of Argentina, 4-6, 6-4, 6-4.

Gambill, 19, and playing in his second year on the ATP Tour event, held his own for much of the match with Chang, dropping serve only once each set. But each break was enough for Chang, playing his first clay court match this year, to hold onto the lead.

Chang took advantage of Gambill's two-handed shots on both the forehand and backhand side, running his young opponent from side to side and forcing him into errors on the stretch.

Chang won the first set 6-3 on a forehand error by Gambill, then used a forehand winner of his own to take victory 6-3 in the second set in one hour and 11 minutes.

Chang said he was surprised to learn it was his 500th win.

"It makes you feel a little bit old," he said. "Being 25, people forget this is my tenth year on the tour. But tennis-wise I think bigger and better things are waiting for me in the future."

Chang would like one of those things to be the world's number one ranking. He has been as high as number two. "All my life I've been hearing things like he's too small, too defensive, he's not going to last," Chang said. "I've had a lot of sceptics but I enjoy the challenge of going out and proving people wrong."

Al Wihdat to form basketball team

By Roufan Nahhas
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Al Wihdat Sports Club is planning to put its mark on the Kingdom's basketball scene, according to club spokesman Khader Siwwan.

"We had this idea for a long time, and we think that the time has now come to implement it," Siwwan Wednesday told the Jordan Times.

Al Wihdat Club have been in contact with the Jordan Basketball Federation (JBF) asking for the go-ahead which will enable them to add basketball to its highly successful soccer and volleyball teams.

"We asked the JBF and we are still awaiting for their official response. These things are time consuming," he added.

Siwwan said the only obstacle that hindered having a basketball team was providing a court.

"We waited until we finished building the court and all facilities. We are ready now," he added.

To start the team, Al Wihdat Club recruited an Iraqi coach and many basketball enthusiasts.

"We have chosen our coach and began practising," he said. "Many young basketball enthusiasts flocked to Al Wihdat headquarters to be part of the new team."

"We will give a chance to those who are serious, dedicated and talented," said Siwwan.

When they start actual competition, the new team will play in the third division according to the JBF regulations.

"We will start according to the laws of the JBF and hope to be part of the national championships," he said.

Siwwan said there were no plans to participate in any matches or championships this season. "Our priority at the moment is to form a team," he added.

NBA playoffs start Thursday as Bulls aim for 5th title

WASHINGTON (AFP) — Michael Jordan has played more minutes than any season since 1990. Dennis Rodman is coming off an injured left knee and Toni Kukoc missed the past nine games with a sore right foot.

"I'm sure people are going to read a lot into all of that, but when we are full strength, everyone knows how well we can play together," Jordan said. "Now we're the targets and we have to deal with it."

Despite the setbacks, the Chicago Bulls are an overwhelming favourite to claim their fifth National Basketball Association crown in seven years when playoffs begin Thursday. The Bulls open Friday against Washington.

"There is no doubt who the greatest team is," Washington coach Bernie Bickerstaff said. "They have confidence and until somebody dethrones them they're the team to beat. Their confidence level is so high."

Jordan, who averaged 37.3 minutes a game, won his ninth NBA scoring title with 29.6 points. Rodman claimed the rebounding crown with 16.1 a game despite suspensions and the late-season injury.

"It's money time, time to defend what's ours, time to go out and play," Rodman said. "I'm ready to go."

Kukoc expects some pain but will play through it when the Bulls (69-13) face the Bulls (44-38) in a best-of-five opening round series.

"I have to play in the playoffs," Kukoc said. "I know it's going to get some, but I will just have to play with it."

An improved group of Eastern Conference challengers awaits. But Bulls coach Phil Jackson said the only people the Bulls must fear are themselves.

"We're the only ones that can defeat ourselves by not being ready and not being prepared," he said. "We just have to be physically ready. We won't be when the playoffs start but hopefully we have time to get there."

Other first-round matchups send Miami (61-21) against Orlando (45-37), New York (57-25) against Charlotte (54-28) and Atlanta (56-26) against Detroit (54-28).

The Heat feature centre Alonzo Mourning and playmaker Tim Hardaway while rival Orlando boasts Penny Hardaway and centre Rony Seikaly, who averaged 17.3 points and 9.5 rebounds a game in the spot Shaquille O'Neal vacated.

"Alonzo is excellent and very physical. Rony has to step up his physical game and be aggressive," Magic coach Richie Adubato said.

Miami's Jamal Mashburn, a mid-season acquisition from Dallas, could be a key factor along with Horace Grant, the Magic rebound star nursing a sore wrist. The Heat and Magic split four games against each other.

Miami went 32-9 on the road and beat Chicago twice, giving coach Pat Riley optimism Miami can push Chicago if they meet in the Conference final.

"They have made themselves a viable candidate," Atlanta coach Lenny Wilkens said.

"We've gained lots of

respect around the league," Riley said.

"Everybody is going to be judged on what they do in the playoffs."

"We're confident. But we know there are a lot of land mines and trap doors out there."

The Heat-Magic winner faces either Charlotte or New York, arch foes who know each other well. A pre-season swap sent Larry Johnson to New York for Anthony Mason. We will soon see which club was helped the most.

"It's going to be a knock-down, dragged-out affair," Charlotte coach Dave Cowens predicts. "Their big man is Patrick Ewing. Ours is Glen Rice. And Glen is having one of those years where he is not to be denied."

Ewing averaged 22.4 points and 10.7 rebounds. Rice had 26.8 points while Mason had 11.4 rebounds and Vlade Divac pulled down 9.1 a game plus played tough defence on Ewing as the Hornets won three of four from the Knicks.

"We got more aggressive against them," Cowens said. "When we started realising that's how we had to play, we started playing a lot better."

Knicks coach Jeff Van Gundy expects trouble.

"Charlotte dominated us during the regular season. They outplayed us badly," he said. "We have to find better ways of scoring and defending Rice. The season was telling. They handled us fairly easily."

Detroit has faded while Atlanta has risen in the final month of the season. The Pistons will rely on Grant Hill, who averaged 21.4 points.

"Grant has become a tremendous all-around player," Collins said.

"We know they will give some help on defence so we have to find the open man. If they play him one-on-one, he will get to the basket and make the plays."

But he must get past Zaire-born centre Dikembe Mutombo, who swatted aside 3.4 shots and pulled down 11.6 rebounds a game, and Christian Laettner, who averaged 8.8 rebounds alongside Mutombo.

"Dikembe has been a tremendous asset," Wilkens said. "We have to go to him on offence. He commands respect."

Maradona back at Boca but says 'no saviour'

BUENOS AIRES (R) — Diego Maradona signed up for Boca Juniors Tuesday for what he promised would be his last and best comeback to Argentine soccer — but warned he was no "saviour" come to change Boca's flagging fortunes.

"I hope this is the definitive, best and last time," the 36-year-old fading superstar said at a signing ceremony packed with journalists and television cameras.

His return to Boca, his first love in soccer and the most popular side in Argentina, was demanded by long-suffering fans who have not had a title for the last eight tournaments.

But there were doubts about his health that have dogged him since he admitted he was a cocaine addict. The now chubby Maradona went to hospital for high blood pressure checks last week and fell ill in Chile, breaking out in a cold sweat on television after dancing with a former miss universe.

Boca, in Buenos Aires' tough docks, is hardly in better shape. 13th in the league with only two wins in nine matches.

Boca fans are in no doubt that the hero of Argentina's 1986 World Cup victory could change their fortunes, chanting, "Diegoooo...Diegoooo" on the terraces every Sunday. Maradona, who was on Boca's books last season but had not played since last August, tried to settle the worries about his fitness by saying: "I'm in the same shape as a 16-year-old."

But he also played down hopes he would rescue Boca, telling a reporter who asked if he was "the saviour": "My name is Diego Armando Maradona and I don't save anybody. I just want to play football."

His recent career has been blighted by drugs, bans, failed comebacks and attempts at coaching, and he almost had to bow out with a lucrative deal to play in Japan. But club chairman Mauricio Macri, but of outrageous insults from Maradona for his yuppie-style management, spoke of Boca's: "Hope that after so many years of frustration the club can succeed again."

"We're not asking him for the miracles he performed in the past, but just to give us his personality and conviction."



Barcelona's Alexander Djordjevic (R) tries to dribble past Villeurbanne of France's Remi Rippert during their European Final Four basketball semifinal championship match. Barcelona won 77-70 and will play Olympiakos of Greece in the final (Reuters photo)

Barcelona beat off Italians for Ronaldo signature

BARCELONA (AFP) — Barcelona's Brazilian striker Ronaldo is poised to sign a new contract with the First Division side said club president Jose Luis Nunez here on Wednesday.

Nunez, who fought off several clubs for the 20-year-old World Footballer of the Year notably a \$30 million bid from Serie A side Lazio, said the new deal would keep Ronaldo at the club until 2006.

"The sole remaining problem is the wording of the contract," Nunez said.

The contract includes a \$107 million payment to the club if Ronaldo leaves before the end of 2006 — beating the previous record, \$42 million, set by Real Madrid for their teenage Spanish sensation Raul a fortnight ago.

Nunez said the deal with Ronaldo, who emulated compatriot Romario's feat of three years ago scoring 30 goals for Barcelona in a season last Sunday, would be financed by Nike, Adidas, Kappa and are canvassing a fourth unnamed company.

Irvine hungry for more at San Marino Grand Prix

FIORANO, Italy (AFP) — Eddie Irvine is predicting more success at this weekend's San Marino Grand Prix, after Ferrari's number two driver came within an ace of winning in Argentina.

After a difficult start to the season, which included press speculation that he could even be sacked, the Ulsterman's second place in Buenos Aires has given him new confidence for the race at Imola.

"I'm counting down the seconds," he said at a private practice session here.

Partnering Michael Schumacher in Ferrari's bid for the constructors title, Irvine's six points in Argentina — his best ever result for Ferrari — have also lifted him into sixth place in the drivers' table.

"Only the McLarens, (David) Coulthard and (Mika) Hakkinen, are ahead of me. The other number two drivers at Williams and Benetton — (Heinz-Harald) Frentzen and (Jean) Alesi — are both far behind."

"That means that I'm doing my

job at Ferrari, which is to earn points for the constructors championship and also take some away from Schumacher's direct rivals," he told the Gazzetta Dello Sport.

The next stage comes on Ferrari's home soil and Irvine is clearly counting on the Argentina effect.

"This is a really important race and if it hadn't been for the morale boost in Buenos Aires, I'd be feeling a bit uneasy. Instead, I feel relaxed and I'm convinced I can do well again."

"It went fairly well last year, with Michael coming second and me fourth. This time we could try for even more because the car is better than last year's and the crowd will really get behind us."

The 31-year-old Irvine was meanwhile defensive about his season to date.

The Ulsterman was involved in a first lap collision at the season opening Australian Grand Prix and was forced out soon afterwards, although race officials cleared him of any blame for the accident.

Caught up in another collision in Brazil meant restarting the race with a totally unsuited reserve car and taking 16th place.

"I was calm about things even before Argentina because I knew I wasn't responsible for what happened to me in the first two races — and above all because I knew the team had complete faith in me," he said.

"And there's another reason why I feel good now, which is that we've fixed the problem with the brakes which had been given me trouble in practice at Interlagos and Buenos Aires."

"Believe me, it's not easy to drive when you know the brakes aren't working properly and you know there's a risk of spinning the car."

GOREN BRIDGE

WITH OMAR SHARIF
& TARIK HUSSEIN
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OFF ON THE RIGHT FOOT

East-West vulnerable. South deals.

NORTH
♠ 442
♥ 743
♦ J109
♣ QJ85

EAST
♠ J1098
♥ J888
♦ 2
♣ 10632

SOUTH
♠ KQ75
♥ AQ2
♦ AK63
♣ AK

The bidding:
SOUTH WEST NORTH EAST
SNT Pass Pass Pass

Opening lead: Five of ♠
We have repeatedly urged players to pause before playing to the first trick to plan their campaign. To illustrate our point, the opening chapter in Eddie Kantar's new lesson series (Kantar's Lessons III, published by the author, 13 lessons; available from the author, Box 427, Venice, Calif. 90294, at \$25 postpaid) is devoted to The First Trick (Declarer Play). Here's an example hand.

"With the first diamond high, cash the A-K of clubs and then lead a low diamond. By playing diamonds in this way, you force an entry to the clubs and wind up with at least nine tricks: four clubs, three diamonds and at least one trick in each major. Count tricks, form a plan and then play!"

"If a spade is ever led from dummy, East should play the jack (the same card the defender would have led) to show the sequence. The play of the eight trumps nothing."

The lessons are full of such suggestions. Well worth the investment.

TODAY AT

CINEMA TEL:634144
PHILADELPHIA "1"

Michael Douglas
& Val Kilmer ... in

THE GHOST AND THE DARKNESS

Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30

CINEMA TEL:634144
PHILADELPHIA "2"

Demi Moore.... in

STRIPTease

Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30

CINEMA TEL:699238
PLAZA

Eddie Murphyin

METRO

Shows: 12:30, 3:15, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30

THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTREDAME
Show: 5:00 p.m.

CINEMA TEL:677420
CONCORD

CONCORD "1"

Steven Segal...in

GLIMMER MAN

Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30

CONCORD "2"

Michael Jordan...in

SPACEJAM

Shows: 3:30, 6:00

Nabil & Hisham's Theatre
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AMN YA HO

For reservations call 625155



END TO HOSTAGE CRISIS: Smoke billows from the residence of the Japanese ambassador in Lima on Tuesday as Peruvian special forces storm the residence to rescue 72 hostages held by Tupac Amaru rebels for 18 weeks. Police sources say all the hostage-takers were killed in the operation (see page 1) (AFP photo)

Algerian government asks nation to mobilise

ALGIERS (AFP) — Algeria's leaders appealed to the nation to mobilise against terrorism as the country reeled from a vicious mass killing in which 93 villagers were killed and 100 others injured or killed by anti-government Islamists.

In a highly unusual appeal that contrasted with the authorities' accustomed silence in the face of such massacres, Prime Minister Ahmed Ouyahia went on television and radio soon after the attack to call for "mobilisation" and "vigilance."

In another new departure, the evening news programme led with the slaughter, showing footage of women survivors being comforted in hospital by Health Minister Yahia Guidoum.

One 14-year-old boy described seeing the attackers slit the throats of his father, mother, brothers and aunts.

A woman was shown lying in bed with a deep wound in her throat.

She described how she pretended to be dead as one of the killers repeatedly kicked what he thought was a corpse.

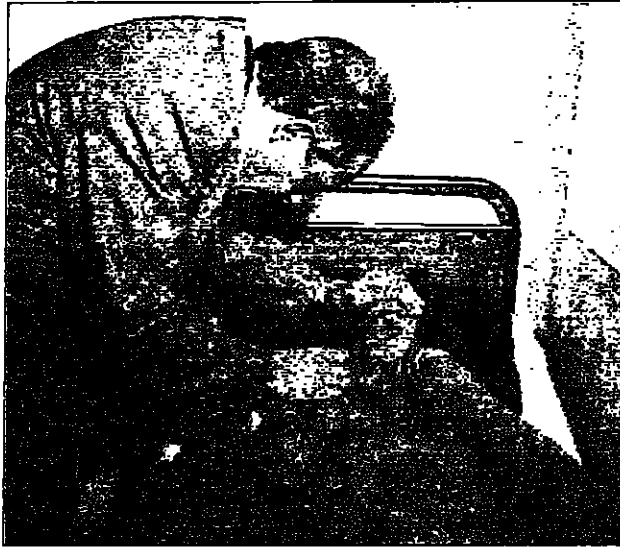
Private press reports and survivors said that the massacre was carefully planned as a combat operation. It was carried out by a group of between 150 and 200 men with beards "down to their waists" and, in some cases, mounted on horseback.

The attackers planted mines and bombs at the outskirts of the village — in the Bougara region of Blida just 20 kilometres from Algiers — to hamper rescue efforts by security forces.

The villagers, including 43 women and girls and three children, had their throats slit or were clubbed to death with farming tools. Other victims were burnt alive in their homes and five young girls were reported to have been abducted.

The slaughter was the worst mass killing since militants took up arms against the regime five years ago.

It brought to 300 the total number of civilians killed in



Picture released by WTN of a footage of the Algerian state television on Tuesday showing Algerian Health Minister Yahia Guidoum comforting a survivor of the worst attack in the country's five-year civil war (AFP photo)

the last three weeks in the Blida and Medea regions alone, according to partial tolls.

The Liberté daily put the number of dead in the massacre at over 100, while the Arab newspaper Al Hayat, published in several Arab and Western capitals, put the figure at 150.

Casualty figures in the five-year civil war continued to rise Wednesday, with the Al Khabar daily reporting that armed insurgents had killed five people at a bogus roadblock set up southwest of Algiers and one in a bomb attack on a railway line near Blida.

The roadblock attack occurred Tuesday between the villages of Berrouaghia and Khemis Miliana, the newspaper said.

The railway bombing struck as a goods train was passing near Blida, 60 kilometres south of Algiers, the paper said. The attack injured three people and caused extensive damage to the train.

The attitude of the authorities in the wake of the Bougara massacre is in stark contrast to its response to a wave of brutal attacks in January and February this year.

These were either passed over in silence or mentioned in brief statements from the

security services, and were buried down low in news broadcasts.

This time, the regime appears to be counting on a backlash from a population weary of violence after a conflict that has left some 60,000 people dead, according to Western estimates.

The killings underline the complete collapse of its security situation in the Mitidja plain, where much of the violence is concentrated, despite numerous searches, helicopter operations and bombardments carried out by security forces since the beginning of February.

Self-defence groups set up by villagers appear equally powerless to combat the terror.

The government insists the bloodshed will not hinder the "process of national revival" that is due to culminate in legislative elections in June. President Liamine Zeroul pledged in January that the polls would go ahead in complete security.

Authorities plan to mobilise all military and paramilitary forces for the vote, as they did during presidential elections in 1995. That election took place peacefully but was followed by a surge of violence once special security measures were lifted.

Iraq basks in U.S. 'defeat' on breach of 'no-fly zone'

BAGHDAD (AFP) — Iraq on Wednesday basked in its "defeat" of the United States by flouting a U.S.-patrolled exclusion zone to send helicopters to fly home Muslim pilgrims from the Saudi border.

"The isolation of the United States is now a tangible reality, at a time when Iraq is winning more and more Arab, Islamic and international support," said the ruling Baath party's newspaper Al Thawra.

The helicopters flown to southern Iraq since Monday in defiance of the Western-imposed "no-fly" zone, meanwhile, waited to fly back the pilgrims returning from Mecca in Saudi Arabia, journalists at the scene said.

"America is chewing over its failure" to prevent the flights, said Al Thawra, while "Iraq, in sending seven helicopters to repatriate sick and weary pilgrims, is merely exercising its sovereign right in its own airspace."

U.S. President Bill Clinton said Tuesday his country will continue to enforce the no-fly zone along with its Western allies, although the Pentagon said the pilgrim flights were only a "technical" violation and will not be punished.

"Such statements, steeped in weakness and disappointment, show up the failure of America and its isolation on the international scene," said another official Baghdad daily, Al Jumhuriyah.

But it said the United States could still resort to military action. "America could commit a stupidity and launch an aggression on Iraq to save face and compensate for its crushing defeat."

The giant is reeling from a severe blow, and it does not want to digest its defeat and its image being shattered within the U.N. Security Council," said the paper.

On Wednesday, journalists in the Arar border region of southern Iraq said the helicopters were on stand-by waiting for dozens of sick and elderly pilgrims to return by buses from Saudi Arabia, adding that it could take days.

Foreign journalists were themselves flown to the border region to witness the return from the annual Mecca pilgrimage known as the Hajj.

The pilgrim flights already appeared to have divided its Gulf Arab neighbours, judging from editorials in Wednesday's newspapers, although there was no reaction from Saudi Arabia.

The Arab Times in Kuwait called for a new military strike against Iraq.

"We see no other alternative but to continue striking at this abnormal regime in Baghdad until its flattening to restore the country to normality," said the daily, adding Washington would choose its time and place to strike.

The United States, which led a multinational coalition to drive Iraq out of Kuwait in the 1991 Gulf war, warned Monday it would "respond appropriately" to any violation of the "no-fly" zone after Iraq announced its plans.

But the next day it ruled out military action.

Newspapers in the United Arab Emirates supported the Iraqi flights for Mecca pilgrims.

"Iraq has the undisputed right to fly its civilians wherever it wants, especially so when it is a religious matter," the English-language daily Gulf Today said.

Baghdad defied the "no-

fly" zone to test "its hypothesis that an increasing number of countries are becoming impatient with the seemingly indefinite extension of the un-imposed sanctions," said the Khaleej Times.

On April 9, Iraq also flouted the U.N. sanctions in force since its August 1990 invasion of Kuwait and flew more than 100 Iraqis to Saudi Arabia for the start of the pilgrimage.

Iraq insisted that the flight was "purely humanitarian" and so not a violation of the embargo, a position which China, Egypt, France and Russia supported in the U.N. Security Council.

The United States failed to secure U.N. condemnation of Iraq.

The U.N. Sanctions Committee is to meet on Thursday to hammer out a consensus on how to respond to Iraqi international flights and debate whether there is a case to grant specific exemptions to Baghdad.

Woods and Jordan hit it off

CHICAGO (AFP) — The wonder boy of golf and the wizard of basketball have decided they have a lot in common. Tiger Woods, the new masters champion, spent the weekend with Michael Jordan, playing golf and going to a basketball game.

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Kohl after compensation for nude sketch of his wife

BONN (AFP) — Germany's Chancellor Helmut Kohl is suing the Soft-Porn magazine Penthouse after the publication carried a cartoon of his wife Hannelore in a pin-up posture, a court in Bonn said Tuesday. The cartoon, which appeared in the January issue, depicts a naked Frau Kohl seductively reclining on a Mercedes. Her husband is leaning at her from behind the windscreen. Kohl, who was said to be furious at the sketch, has taken out a writ against the magazine's publisher Pent Verlag and its two chief editors. He has demanded 100,000 marks (\$59,000) in damages for infringement of his personal rights.

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Iranian parliament adopts resolution against Germany

TEHRAN (AFP) — The Iranian parliament adopted on Wednesday a moderate resolution against Germany, refraining from calls for concrete action and merely calling on the government to retaliate future actions by Bonn.

The 270-member assembly, in a letter signed by around 135 deputies, attacked its German counterpart which condemned Iran last week for "a flagrant violation of international law" over alleged state links to terrorism.

The censure from the Bundestag, or lower house, last Thursday came following a German federal court's ruling on April 10 implicating the Iranian government in the 1992 murder of four Kurdish dissidents in Berlin.

The Bundestag's "hasty move only endorses the baseless and illegal court ruling and shows that the charges have roots in the German government," the Iranian deputies said in the 10-point statement.

They praised the Iranian government for its "calculated and timely" response to Germany over the affair and called for retaliation against any possible move against Tehran from Bonn in the future.

Iran and Germany recalled their ambassadors and each ordered out four diplomats in reaction to the verdict.

Iranian parliament members described the ruling as "another failed attempt" by Israel and the United States to isolate the Islamic republic "in the face of the dead-end in the disgraceful Middle East capitulation process."

Washington, accusing Tehran of sponsoring terrorism and angry over its opposition to the Middle East peace process, has pressured its European allies to cut economic links with Iran.

"We demand the government adjust relations with Germany in tune with Bonn's political independence from Israel and the United States," said the

letter read on the parliament's floor. Iranian members of parliament also asked their government to sue Germany for allegedly supplying Iraq with chemical weapons technology during the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war, and for suspending several projects here after the 1979 Islamic revolution.

The most notable of the projects was a nuclear power plant in the southern Gulf port of Bushehr, which Iran has now consigned to the Russians to complete.

The resolution was a watered down version of the threats made against Germany by Iranian Deputy Parliamentary Speaker Hassan Ruhani after the Berlin court ruling was issued.

Mr. Ruhani had called for a total revision of economic links with Germany, Iran's top trading partner, including the cancellation of Iranian investments in Germany as well as the purchase of German equipment.

The Cyprus-based Middle East Economic Survey (MEES) however reported on Monday that business ties were proceeding between Tehran and Bonn despite the tensions.

Just before the German court announced its verdict April 10, the National Iran Oil Company (NIOC) signed preliminary documents for a \$160-million loan package arranged by Germany's Westdeutsche Landesbank (West LB), it said.

The loan was arranged on behalf of the Iranian Offshore Engineering Construction Company (IOEC), which won the Soroush field development contract earlier this year.

The loan is to finance the renovation and development of the Soroush offshore oilfield, damaged during the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war.

MEES stressed several times that Iran's huge debt to Germany, its main trading partner, made it impossible to freeze economic ties completely, despite the most serious tension between Tehran and the European Union in 10 years.

Lebanese Shiite leader criticises Pope

BEIRUT (AP) — A senior Shiite Muslim cleric Wednesday criticised Pope John Paul II's blessing of Israel but nevertheless welcomed the pontiff's upcoming trip to Lebanon.

The Pope plans to visit Lebanon May 10-11 and will meet with Christian and Muslim political and religious leaders.

The focus of the Pope's visit will be his release of an "apostolic exhortation," or formal response, to a meeting of Lebanese bishops at the Vatican in 1995. In their message, the bishops called for the withdrawal of Israeli and Syrian forces from Lebanon.

The Pope's blessing of Israel, during a meeting at the Vatican with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu last year, and the Holy See's recognition of the Jewish state have angered Muslim leaders in Lebanon.

"We reject the Vatican's recognition of Israel as well as the Pope's blessing of Israel," Grand Ayatollah Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah said in an interview with the Associated Press.

"With all due respect, we consider

that the Pope's move does not conform with the values brought by Jesus Christ," the bearded 62-year-old cleric said at his residence in the Haret Hreik southern suburb, a stronghold of the Iranian-backed Hizbollah guerrilla group.

Sheikh Fadlallah, a senior Shiite religious authority worldwide, is widely thought to be the spiritual guide of Hizbollah.

The movement opposes the U.S.-sponsored Mideast peace process and has vowed to torpedo it through attacks on Israeli troops occupying a border enclave in southern Lebanon.

Hizbollah's mentor, Iran, speaks of Israel as a sworn enemy which must be destroyed.

A papal visit to Lebanon was first planned for 1994 but was put off then for security reasons. Next month's 31-hour trip will be the first by a pontiff to this Arab nation, where Christians make up 45 per cent of the 3.2 million population.

Security at the Pope's public appear-

ances this week at the Vatican was beefed up after Italian intelligence said he could be the target of Islamist extremists.

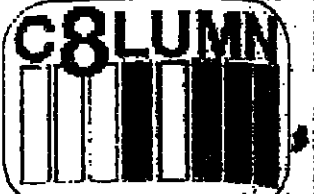
Hizbollah, the main Islamic militant group in Lebanon, has spoken approvingly of the Pope's visit.

"We have welcomed and we again welcome the visit," said Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, secretary-general of Hizbollah. However, he also criticised Vatican recognition of Israel.

He said in a recent television interview that the Pope's security was a matter for authorities to deal with, but Hizbollah would help if asked.

"What's important for us for the Pope to come to Lebanon. I return well and safe, and an impression be given about Lebanon that it is a secure and stable country," Sheikh Nasrallah said.

The Pope will celebrate a mass on May 11 in downtown Beirut, as a symbol of the country's 1975-90 civil war destruction and its reconstruction.



Egyptian farmer digs his own grave

CAIRO (AFP) — A peasant farmer was buried alive when he was digging a grave for himself and his family in a hillside in southern Egypt, the newspaper Al Wakef reported Wednesday. It said Hamad Al Dabee Abadi Halim, 27, from Al Sawwan village, was killed instantly when a pile of sand collapsed on top of him.

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Greek military flights over Cyprus stopped to revive stalled unity talks

NICOSIA (R) — Greek military flights over divided Cyprus have been put on hold during United Nations talks to revive a stalled dialogue between Turkish and Greek-Cypriots, a Greek-Cypriot official said on Tuesday.

"It is the joint position of Greek Prime Minister Costas Simitis and Cypriot President Glafcos Clerides that during the proximity talks it would be good for there to be no flights of Greek fighter planes in Cypriot airspace," said Manolis Christofides, spokesman for the Greek-Cypriot government.

U.N. mediators are conducting proximity talks for the resumption of direct negotiations between the leaders of the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities before June.

Greece, which signed a military pact with the Nicosia government in 1993, was due to conduct an exercise in early May which would have included flights over Cyprus.

"It is an ad hoc decision which concerns this specific exercise," said Mr. Christofides. "It is our stated position that we will not commit acts which may disturb the climate and the atmosphere for the talks."

Greeks and Turks in Cyprus have been living apart since Turkey invaded northern Cyprus in 1974, days after a Greek-Cypriot coup in Nicosia

engineered by the military government ruling Greece at the time.

Previous attempts to reunite Cyprus under a federal umbrella have failed. The need to settle the dispute has become more urgent ahead of Cyprus's desire to join the European Union, and what the U.N. sees as the dangerous military build-up on the island.

"Every step towards defusing tension on the island is welcome as compatible with the current ongoing peace process and the secretary-general's attempt to bring both leaders for direct talks in the first half of 1997," said Waldemar Rokoszewski, spokesman for the United Nations peacekeeping force on the island, UNFICYP.

U.N. Undersecretary-General for Political Affairs Sir Kieran Prendergast will be on the island in May to "familiarise himself" with the situation, diplomatic sources said.

He will not be actively involved in the proximity talks.

NATO partners Greece and Turkey are guarantor powers of Cyprus along with Britain, the former colonial ruler until independence in 1960. Diplomats in Nicosia did not appear surprised at the announcement. "It was very much in the pipeline," said a European diplomat.